



# CDE Guidance on Paraprofessionals Serving IDEA-Eligible Students

## Introduction

On March 13, 2025, the Colorado State Board of Education (SBE) adopted changes to the Rules governing implementation of Colorado’s Exceptional Children’s Educational Act, 1 CCR, 301-8 (ECEA Rules) that address personnel qualifications for paraprofessionals who serve students with disabilities eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

This guidance supports the responsibility of each Administrative Unit (AU) to ensure paraprofessional staff are appropriately and adequately trained and supervised when they are assisting in the provision of special education and related services. This document provides an overview of the new ECEA requirements and addresses frequently asked questions.

## Overview of ECEA Changes to Personnel Qualifications for Paraprofessionals, Effective May 2025

Paraprofessionals may assist licensed professionals in the provision of special education and related services as long as they are appropriately and adequately trained and supervised. In response to feedback from stakeholders, *ECEA Rule 3.04(1)(e)* was revised to expand requirements for paraprofessionals who serve students with disabilities. These changes address three key areas: 1) training, 2) supervision, and 3) impact of criminal convictions on employability.

**Training.** Each Administrative Unit (AU) determines the qualifications, competencies, and training required for paraprofessionals to ensure student safety and the lawful provision of special education and related services.

A paraprofessional must be appropriately and adequately trained in the skills necessary to support a student with disabilities based on their role and consistent with the student’s IEP.

**Supervision.** Each AU must ensure that paraprofessionals are adequately supervised by appropriately licensed professionals. For students with a higher level of vulnerability, the level of supervision should generally increase based on the impact of their disability. For example, a student who is non-verbal may require line-of-sight supervision. *ECEA Rule 3.04(1)(e)*.

**Employability.** An individual with a felony conviction for child abuse is precluded from employment as a paraprofessional under Colorado state law. For an individual with a misdemeanor conviction for child abuse, the AU should carefully consider, on an individualized basis, whether to offer or retain employment as a special education paraprofessional. In making this individualized determination, the AU should “consider the that students with disabilities are a vulnerable population and that there is a strong connection to the nature of the job sought that is likely to preclude employment.” *ECEA Rule 3.04(1)(e)(ii)*.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Paraprofessionals Serving IDEA-Eligible Students

### **Q1: What is a paraprofessional?**

A paraprofessional is a school employee who may assist students with instructional or other support in the school setting under the supervision of a licensed teacher or other licensed professional. Paraprofessionals may also assist a teacher in classroom management and organization.

A variety of terms are used to describe paraprofessionals, including para or para-educator, educational aide or educational assistant (EA), dedicated adult support (DAS), and one-to-one or one-on-one aide.

Paraprofessional support may also be described on the IEP as dedicated adult support or line-of-sight supervision.

### **Q2: What services can a paraprofessional provide to a student with an IEP?**

A paraprofessional may assist in the provision of special education and related services under the supervision of a licensed teacher or related service provider. This means that a paraprofessional may help a licensed teacher or related service professional provide the instructional support and services identified on the IEP as long as they are appropriately trained to provide that support and are doing so under the supervision of a licensed professional.

Paraprofessional support may be provided in areas of academics, communication, social-emotional skills, behavior, adaptive and functional skills, school health services, transition, independent living/life skills or other areas of need identified on the student's IEP.

Guidance about what constitutes adequate supervision of a paraprofessional is provided in Question 9 below.

### **Q3: Are there services that a paraprofessional would not be authorized to provide to a student with an IEP?**

Yes. A paraprofessional must work under the supervision of a licensed teacher or provider and is not authorized to substitute for or fill the role of a licensed teacher or related service provider unless they also hold the appropriate professional license. For example, a paraprofessional may not design lesson plans and special education instructional activities or evaluate student performance unless they are also a licensed special education teacher.

In addition, a paraprofessional may not provide services and support for which they have not been appropriately and adequately trained. For example, a paraprofessional should not provide behavioral support to a student with a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) if they have not received basic training in the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, de-escalation techniques, and student-specific training on how to implement the BIP.

### **Q4: What credentials are required for a paraprofessional?**

Colorado state law does not set minimum credentials for paraprofessionals, nor does it impose specific licensure or certification requirements. Instead, each AU is responsible for ensuring that paraprofessionals providing services to students with disabilities are appropriately and adequately trained and supervised based on their role and responsibilities.

While state law does not set minimum credential requirements, a paraprofessional must pass a criminal background check as a condition of employment. An individual with a felony conviction for child abuse is precluded from employment as a paraprofessional by state law. For an individual with a misdemeanor

conviction for child abuse or other offense against a vulnerable person, the AU should carefully consider, on an individualized basis, whether to offer or retain employment as a special education paraprofessional. In making this individualized determination, the AU should “consider the that students with disabilities are a vulnerable population and that there is a strong connection to the nature of the job sought that is likely to preclude employment.” *ECEA Rule 3.04(1)(e)(ii)*.

#### **Q5: What training is required for a paraprofessional?**

A paraprofessional who assists in the provision of special education and related services must be adequately and appropriately trained based on their role and the services they are providing to individual students. This means that the training should cover all areas necessary to perform their specific role as well as any individualized or student-specific training necessary to ensure that support and services are provided consistent with the requirements of the IEP.

Recommended training topics include: confidentiality (consistent with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and state privacy laws); mandated reporting of child abuse (consistent with *22-32-109(1)(z), C.R.S.*); characteristics of disability categories; positive behavioral interventions and support and de-escalation techniques; legal requirements related to provision of special education; and local policies and procedures.

Training should be **differentiated** based on the paraprofessional’s role and whether they are providing 1:1 support, providing instructional support for a classroom, providing a related service (e.g., feeding, hygiene, transportation), or supporting a student who is Deaf, blind, or nonverbal. For example, a school nurse may train and delegate a paraprofessional to provide gastrostomy-tube (g-tube) feeding.

Any paraprofessional assisting with the provision of special education or a related service must be adequately and appropriately trained to provide instructional or other support **consistent with the student’s IEP**. This means that the paraprofessional may require additional training specific to that student and their individualized needs to ensure the IEP is being implemented with fidelity.

Training should be provided before services start or within a reasonable time based on the necessity of the skills being taught, with any necessary refresher training completed annually. *ECEA Rule 3.04(1)(e)(i)*.

Finally, the CDE recommends that AUs maintain written documentation of the trainings paraprofessional staff have been provided. Documentation should include the date, trainer, and general subject matter, as well as any training specific to a student’s IEP. Options for documenting training courses that have been provided might include the HR system, the professional development system, and the student information portal for student-specific training.

#### **Q6: Who is responsible for determining and providing the required training for paraprofessionals who support IDEA-eligible students?**

Each AU determines the qualifications, competencies, and training required for paraprofessionals to ensure student safety and the lawful provision of special education and related services.

#### **Q7: Does a paraprofessional require specific credentials or training to work in certain areas, such as instructional or behavioral support for a student with an IEP?**

No. Neither IDEA nor ECEA explicitly require that a paraprofessional obtain specific credentials to provide instructional or behavioral support. As described in Question 5, a paraprofessional must be appropriately and adequately trained based on their role in providing support to an IDEA-eligible student and must provide such support under the direct supervision of a licensed professional. Some school personnel, such as a

registered behavior technician (RBT) or a speech language pathology assistant (SLPA) do require specific training and certification, but these certifications are not required for an individual serving in a paraprofessional role.

**Q8: Can a paraprofessional provide instruction designed by a licensed special education teacher or related service provider, such as a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA), speech language pathologist, or school psychologist?**

Yes. A paraprofessional may provide instructional and other support to an IDEA-eligible student under the direct supervision of a licensed professional. Licensed professionals should carefully consider their own licensure requirements before delegating support and services to a paraprofessional to ensure the delegation is consistent with their own professional responsibilities.

**Q9: What does “direct supervision” mean?**

In general, a paraprofessional is working under the supervision of a licensed professional when 1) delivering instruction, support, and activities that were designed by the appropriate licensed professional based on the licensed professional’s evaluation of the student’s need and achievement, and 2) the paraprofessional is working in close proximity to the licensed professional. For a paraprofessional providing support in a general education classroom, the licensed general education teacher may constitute the requisite licensed professional.

A paraprofessional who is providing services in a classroom in which the licensed teacher visits once or twice a week, but who is not otherwise in the classroom, would not meet the standard for supervision. Similarly, a paraprofessional who is regularly providing direct instruction *in another location* while the licensed teacher provides instruction to the rest of the class would not meet the standard for supervision. The requirement of close proximity does not include a temporary safety or emergency situation during which a paraprofessional is instructed to take a group of students out of the classroom while the teacher remains with a student in need of crisis intervention.

For students with significant support needs or a higher level of vulnerability, the level of supervision should also increase to ensure safety. For example, line-of-sight supervision provided for students who are nonverbal or who have complex medical needs. What “line-of-sight” supervision, or other similar terms, would require may differ based on the student’s individualized needs. To ensure that parents and staff responsible for providing “line-of-sight” supervision understand what this level of supervision requires, the IEP should describe what this level of supervision looks like for the student and when it is to be provided in sufficient detail.

**Q10: When and how should paraprofessional support be described on a student’s IEP?**

A student’s IEP team is responsible for determining the special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services that the student needs to make progress towards their annual goals and be involved with and make progress in the general education curriculum. If a student’s IEP team determines that they require dedicated paraprofessional support for all or part of a school day, the IEP should describe the support to be provided in the service delivery statement in sufficient detail so that parents and school staff responsible for implementing the IEP, including paraprofessional staff, understand what paraprofessional support is to be provided when and where.