

## Effective Use of Teacher Assistants (TAs) – What is research saying? – February 2010

### Topics Addressed In This Handout

- Teacher Assistant Use Linked to Student Achievement
- What Teachers Need to Know About the Effective Use of TAs
- Teacher Assistant Assignment Considerations
- Teacher Assistant Professional Development
- National Trends and State Practices re: Teacher Assistants

Several of the articles summarized in this handout are also referenced on the following website: <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/?Page=parasupport/chrono.html>, a website sponsored by the University of Vermont, College of Education and Social Services, Center on Disability and Community Inclusion. This website provides a listing of summaries of data-based and non data-based literature related to paraprofessionals (1990-2008). In some instances, the listing on this website includes links to a summary or full text of the articles cited.

Topic: <b><i>TA Use Linked to Student Achievement</i></b>
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★ Causton-Theoharis, J.N., Giangreco, M.F., Doyle, M.B. and Vadasy, P.F. (2007). **Paraprofessionals: The “sous-chefs” of literacy instruction.** *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40 (1), 56-62 reports on how to use TAs effectively in supporting student achievement in literacy. Like teams of sous-chefs working under the direction of executive chefs, TAs work under the direction and supervision of teachers to implement instructional tasks delegated to them and for which the TAs are trained.

### General Best Practices for Working with TAs that list various strategies for:

1. Welcoming and acknowledging TAs
2. Orienting TAs
3. Planning for TAs
4. Communicating with TAs

### 5 Ways to Use TA Effectively for Literacy Instruction

1. Use TAs in supplementary roles rather than for primary instruction
2. Use research-based reading approaches rather than expecting TAs to make instructional decisions themselves
3. Train TAs in the reading approach
4. Train TAs to manage behavior
5. Support TAs with ongoing monitoring and feedback on how they are doing

### How TA Can Support (Rather Than Instruct) Literacy Instruction

1. Answer individual questions
2. Re-read stories with students
3. Reinforce skills by leading a game or activity
4. Listen to students read
5. Practice letter names and sounds
6. Lead sound-categorization activities
7. Use story sequencing
8. Play dictionary games
9. Perform alphabetizing and rhyming exercises
10. Lead syllable-segmentation tasks
11. Direct magnetic-letterboard activities

### Systems of Communication with TAs

1. Establish a firm 15-minute meeting time each day
2. Have a longer (45 to 60 minute) meeting each week
3. Set monthly meeting to discuss individual students
4. Meet when students do not need supports, e.g., lunch, recess, special-area classes

5. Set up a communication notebook for teacher and TA use
6. Use email to efficiently check in each day or answer questions

#### Non-Instructional Roles for TAs

1. Administrative tasks, e.g., copying
2. Help students/groups that are working independently
3. Research reading materials in the library
4. Create bulletin board displaying student work
5. Read student journal entries
6. Edit student work
7. Search online for new instructional computer games
8. Prepare instructional materials
9. Monitor/support computer work
10. Prepare modifications or adaptations that are planned by the teacher
11. Record student data

★**Paraprofessionals and student achievement**, American Federation of Teachers. (2007, May 22). Retrieved June 25, 2007 from <http://www.aft.org:8765/query.html?qt=Paraprofessionals+and+Student+Achievement&col=aft&charset=iso-8859-1&searchbtn.x=20&searchbtn.y=6>. This document presents abstracts of studies that demonstrate the positive impact that paraprofessionals have on student achievement. Highlights from these abstracts are:

**“The Teacher Aide Puzzle: Student Achievement Issues: An Exploratory Study.”** C.M. Achilles et al. Paper presented at the Mid-South Educational Research Association, 1993. “...classes with dedicated aides often are the best for retained pupils, even better than classes with small class size.”

**“Do Teacher-Aides Improve Student Performance? Lessons from Project STAR.”** John Folger and Carolyn Breda. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, 1990. Later published in the *Peabody Journal of Education*. “Focusing on students from low-socioeconomic (SES) families, the authors found that in the first grade, the presence of dedicated aides was associated with higher achievement than in the control group.” This article noted that the students with higher achievement were in classes with full-time aides as opposed to the control group with part-time aides.

This document then cited additional research supporting “Key to their positive effect, though, is adequate and on-going professional development and training, and appropriate assignment and supervision. We also know that training in collaborative practices for teachers and paraprofessionals further supports their effectiveness in the classroom.” (p. 2)

**“Partners-in-Reading: Using Classroom Assistants to Provide Tutorial Assistance to Struggling First-Grade Readers.”** Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR), Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 333-349 (July 2003). “This program was used in North Carolina elementary schools for first-grade students who could not be accommodated in Reading Recovery. The aides who did the tutoring received training in appropriate techniques and strategies. At the end of both first and second grade, students tutored by aides had scores comparable to those of students tutored by Reading Recovery teachers, and significantly better than those in the control group.”

**Programmed Tutorial Reading Project, Indianapolis, Indiana. It Works.** ERIC, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C., 1969. “The program provided students with 15 or 30 minutes of one-to-one attention per day, as a supplement to regular instruction. The tutors, usually paraprofessionals, were trained in specific strategies to provide reinforcement and to move the students through the material according to their responses.” This study showed positive effects from paraprofessional use as compared to the control group and showed that 30 minutes was more beneficial than 15 minutes. “The program also documented substantial reductions in retentions.”

**Teaching All Children to Read.** M.A. Wallach & L. Wallach. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. This study provided paraprofessional tutors for one-half hour per day for a year using a

curriculum that emphasized phoneme identification skills. "Tutoring began as a separate component to the overall reading program and was incorporated into classroom instruction as the year progressed." Students with paraprofessional support achieved higher than the control groups.

**CSRQ Center Report on Elementary School Comprehensive School Reform Models.** Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center. Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research, 2006. "This is one of several reviews to analyze student achievement in Success for All (SFA) schools. The review found that SFA, along with Direct Instruction, was one of the most effective evidence-based programs in America's schools. Tutoring by paraprofessionals was one of the main components of Success for All. Note also that paraprofessionals worked with small groups as part of the Direct Instruction program. In each case, the paraprofessionals had professional development that was designed to enable them to make a difference in student achievement."

★Granger, J.D. and Grek, M. (2005, Summer) **Struggling readers stretch their skills: Project maximizes use of paraprofessionals to teach reading.** *Journal of Staff Development*, 26(3), 32-36 report that TAs can make a significant difference in increasing students' literacy skills if TAs: Have an understanding of reading concepts such as phonemic awareness, alphabetic decoding and spelling; Demonstrate warmth and enthusiasm toward students; Use an explicitly research-based curriculum; and Take part in high-quality PD along with teachers – as a team. This included not only training in the reading curriculum's content and underlying concepts but also using embedded modeling, feedback and ongoing follow-up support such as study groups, assistance and additional training to ensure teachers and TAs adopted the new instructional practices as part of their routines. The use of this model resulted in the percentage of students scoring at grade level on the state's standardized test in reading, math and writing increasing significantly.

★Jolly, A. and Evans, S. (2005, Summer) **Teacher assistants move to the front of the class: Job-embedded learning pays off in student achievement.** *Journal of Staff Development*, 26(3), 8-13 describes a middle school that used TA learning teams as job-embedded PD to increase TAs' expertise in literacy in order to increase student performance in reading.

*TA Learning Team Format:*

1. Organize: Take care of logistics and establish norms.
2. Define: Identify team's purpose and goals.
3. Learn: Study research-based information and together increase TA knowledge base.
4. Act: Plan, develop and try new teaching strategies with students.
5. Analyze: Share results of trying out strategies, reflecting on these, discussing and adjusting as needed.
6. Assess: Monitor, observe, and look for evidence that you are gaining new skills and making a difference for students.
7. Document: Keep team logs of meetings.
8. Share: Share progress and effective practices with faculty, administrators and others.

*Results of TA PD:*

1. Increased knowledge and skills about reading instruction.
2. Improved TA attitudes about their roles.
3. Benefits for students including improvement in reading proficiency in one year from 75% to 85.3% - an accomplishment in which TAs played an integral role as part of the instructional team.

*Reasons for Success:*

1. TA learning teams are part of the district's overall PD initiatives to increase student achievement in reading.
2. Administration sees ALL staff as essential to helping students learn.
3. Administration values PD for ALL staff.
4. Teams get regular administrator feedback as a result of team log review.

★Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D.J., and Pollock, J.E. **Classroom Instruction That Works - Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement**, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001 provides research on student learning. They conclude that if you really want students

to learn, if you really want to reform and improve schools, you must include as many of the items below as is possible.

1. Identifying similarities and differences
2. Summarizing and note taking
3. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
4. Homework and practice
5. Nonlinguistic representations (drawing maps, charts, etc.)
6. Cooperative learning
7. Setting objectives and providing feedback
8. Generating and testing hypotheses
9. Questions, cues, and advance organizers

Think about the instructional activities that teacher assistants help support and you'll understand why teacher assistants are so important for student learning.

<u>Topic:</u> <b><i>What Teachers Need to Know About the Effective Use of TAs</i></b>
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★Carnahan, C.R., Williamson, P., Clarke, L. and Sorensen, R. (2009). **A systematic approach for supporting paraeducators in educational settings: A guide for teachers.** *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 41 (5), 34-43. Research shows that duties that TAs perform most often on a weekly basis include: instruction (1:1, small group, large group); “data collection/ observation, preparation/ planning, reproducing/ typing instructional materials, playground/ hall/ lunch/ bus supervision, attending meetings/ inservice, behavior management and storytelling/ reading aloud.” (p. 34) Teachers who provide appropriate direction and supervision to TAs do the following. They foster “a collaborative or shared philosophy and effective adult-to-adult communication” (p. 35) using “explicit, concrete language” “with detailed descriptions” including “(a) explanations of desired outcomes, (b) explicit strategies for verbal and physical interaction with students, and (c) strategies for reinforcing appropriate or desired behaviors”; “examples and nonexamples”; “modeling” and “checking for understanding” (p. 36). “Keys to maintaining effective classroom environments include (a) conducting regularly scheduled staff meetings, (b) assessing (TA) performance, (c) providing ongoing learning opportunities, and (d) providing opportunities for problem solving.” (p. 36) When introducing a new teaching strategy, the teacher should work with the TA allowing for review and practice, modeling, observing the TA, coaching and follow-up and other considerations such as recognizing that TAs “need time to practice the strategies before teachers expect proficiency” and, thus, it is important for the teacher to do “ongoing performance assessments of (TAs) as part of their overall plan”. (p. 41) Finally, research underscores the need for teachers to ensure that TAs to (a) understand their role in confidentiality, (b) have appropriate guidance re: teaching content material via “evidence-based strategies” (p. 42) and (c) are provided positive feedback and appreciation.

★Response to Intervention (RTI) is being used more and more in schools in RI and across the nation. RTI is a collaborative problem solving approach to meeting the needs of all students that includes: (1) data-based systematic problem-solving, (2) ongoing assessment to monitor student progress, (3) addressing the academic and behavioral need of all students through interventions of varied intensity depending on student needs and abilities, and (4) shared responsibility for student learning across instructional and administrative school personnel and families. In such a collaborative approach, TAs have an important role to play.

In 2006-07, Dr. Laura Hauerwas and Dr. Debbie Goessling conducted research on the use of TAs (paraeducators) in RTI. They did this research in conjunction with RI's TA Networks and work with Sowams Elementary in Barrington. Their article describing their research can be accessed through TECPlus – Teaching Exceptional Children Plus. TECPlus is the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)'s online-only practitioner's journal at <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus>. By typing in a keyword(s) into the “Search” box and clicking on “Go”, you can see the names of a variety of articles. Then, click on the article title and you can see an article abstract or download the entire article. For example, to find the article by Dr. Hauerwas and Dr. Goessling, keywords are: response to intervention, paraeducators, or professional development. The reference for their article is: Hauerwas, L.B. & Goessling, D.P. (2008). **Who are the interventionists? Guidelines for paraeducators in RTI.** *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 4(3) Article 4. Retrieved 2/13/08 from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol4/iss3/art4>.

The authors provide “recommendations for the effective use of TAs in general education and special education classrooms” as follows:

1. "TAs as members of school-wide intervention teams;
2. A greater focus on the use of TAs during the assessment process;
3. Better professional development;
4. Increased common planning time for enhanced communication about student learning”

They note, “TAs should be considered as valuable members of instructional teams. Their direct support of student learning often has significant impact on student success in the classroom. As such they need to be informed as well as have their voices heard regarding student progress. TAs need to have information about effective instructional strategies, curriculum expectations, and ways to communicate with classroom teachers and special educators about specific characteristics of students. TAs’ unique relationships with students can often provide them with specific information about each student’s day to day successes and challenges, student preferences and interests and a student’s frustration level. TAs (as well as all professional staff) need to recognize the shared responsibility for student learning. Collaboration leads to success.”

The article concludes with “TAs can be a valuable part of RTI teams by:

1. Assisting classroom teachers and special educators with screening
2. Assisting teachers with benchmarking and progress monitoring assessments
3. Recording observations of behavior and learning strategies
4. Entering assessment data into management system
5. Serving as member of intervention team
6. Collaborating with teachers to provide support for students
7. Helping implement interventions
8. Participating in school-wide PD”

★Riggs, C.G. (2004). **To teachers: What paraeducators want you to know.** *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36 (5), 8-12 reports that research reveals that nationally many teachers were not taught how to work with teacher assistants (TAs) when they were training to be teachers. This study with general and special education TAs working with students pre-K through high school identified the following things that paraeducators (TAs) want teachers to know.

1. “Know the (TA’s) name, background and interests.
2. Be familiar with district policies for (TAs).
3. View the teacher and (TA) as a team.
4. Share your classroom expectations with (TAs).
5. Define specific roles and responsibilities for (TAs) and teachers.
6. Direct and supervise (TAs) – it is the teacher’s responsibility.
7. Communicate with TAs.
8. Recognize that (TAs) have experience and knowledge to share.
9. As the teacher, take ownership of all students.
10. Show respect for TAs.”

★State and federal law stipulate that TAs work under the supervision and direction of the classroom teacher or other appropriately certified professional staff. What do teachers need to know to carry out this role? Research on this topic is reported in the journal article: Wallace, T., Shin, J., Bartholomay, T. and Stahl, B.J. (2001, Summer) **Knowledge and skills for teachers supervising the work of paraprofessionals.** *Exceptional Children*, 67(4), 520-33. Research with administrators, teachers and TAs identified these teacher competencies related to TAs:

- Communication with TAs–Share student info; explain TA role;
- Planning and scheduling–Coordinate schedules, set goals, plans and planning time, consider TA strengths and interests in aligning tasks;
- Instructional support–Provide TA regular feedback, support TA in instruction including those working in independent capacities;
- Modeling for TAs– Caring and respectful manner with students;
- Public relations–Inform administrators, teachers and parents about TA role, advocate for TA training, modifications in responsibilities and involvement in decision groups, e.g., IEP meetings;

- Training-Provide on-the-job training for TAs; and
- TA Management-Regular positive and supportive interaction, contribute to performance evaluation, support skill improvement.

The study showed that while these skills were all highly important, teachers do not always do these things, in part, because they may not know they need to or know how. This underscores the need for training teachers in pre-service and on-the-job PD.

**NOTE:** RIDE Guidelines align with research such as that cited above and various other sources. Districts in RI can access training on the Effective Use Of TAs that can be custom-designed to meet local needs at no charge through RIDE (within grant limitations). Training can be designed just for teachers or for teacher/TA teams. To schedule a workshop, access more information on the TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta) on the Training Opportunities webpage. The TA website on the Resources Webpage has a module and related resources on the Effective Use Of TAs.

Topic: <b>Teacher Assistant Assignment Considerations</b>
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★Liston, A.G., Nevin, A., & Malian, I. (2009). **What do paraeducators in inclusive classrooms say about their work? Analysis of national survey data & follow-up interviews in California.** TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus, 5(5), Article 1. Retrieved 8/25/09 from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus>. Paraeducators (TAs) providing instructional support services under the supervision & direction of a qualified teacher worked in inclusive classrooms, defined in the study as “where 2 or more educators have responsibility for teaching students with & without disabilities”. TAs reported that their roles included supporting students in subject matter content via instructional strategies such as (in the order of frequency) directing student behavior, delivering individual instruction, teaching appropriate social skills, supervising peer tutoring, coaching homework & supporting cooperative learning groups as well as data collection & materials preparation. TAs demonstrated noteworthy “knowledge about many evidence-based practices”. Approximately half had a bachelors or associates degree or at or near 2 years of college (data comparable to TAs in RI). 64% emphasized the need for ongoing PD to increase their knowledge about their students & their changing needs & new ideas for effectively working with these students to support them in meeting state standards & goals established for them. TAs in this study offered this advice to other TAs: Be willing to ask & be flexible. The authors of the study recommend to teachers working with TAs to (1) make the TA your “partner in the teaching/learning process”, (2) ask the TA’s opinion about student progress & behaviors, & (3) engage in PD with the TA – as a team, e.g., “to learn a new instructional technique, improve collaborative skills, etc.” Supports that help TAs in their roles are: (1) initial training, reflective coaching from supervisor re: tutoring, small group instruction & data collection, (2) development & use of staff & student social skills norms with opportunities for role playing, (3) enhancing peer tutor use through cooperative group structures, (4) increasing “staff ownership, mutual respect, consistency in” using behavior supports, (5) more structured planning time for all involved staff each week, & (6) PD, time & resources for materials development.

This article is from the website for TECPlus – Teaching Exceptional Children Plus, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)’s online-only practitioner’s journal. By typing in a keyword(s) into the “Search” box & clicking on “Go”, you can see the names of a variety of articles. Then, click on the article title & you can see an article abstract or download the entire article.

★A common phrase one sees in research is ensuring TAs are “helping not hovering”. Research on this topic is reported in: Causton-Theoharis, J. and Malmgren, K. (2005) **Building bridges: Strategies to help paraprofessionals promote peer interaction.** *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(6), 18-24. Research shows that TAs used appropriately are often essential support for students in inclusive settings. However, inappropriate use of 1:1 TAs (excessive TA proximity to students and frequent removal by TA of students from their peers) has an unintended negative impact on student learning and relationships. This article notes, “Many students with disabilities, some by the nature of their disability, have difficulty with social interaction. They may misunderstand social cues, can be unaware of how to begin a conversation with a peer, or have trouble navigating turn taking in a social interaction. When we pair these students with adult one-on-one support, these difficulties can actually intensify. In some cases, the relationship that should occur naturally between peers is developed instead between the student and the paraprofessional.” TAs may unintentionally discourage natural supports/help offered by other students.

TAs may also inadvertently interfere with group work and/or speak on behalf of the student, thus limiting interactions. The article provides helpful ideas to address these problems including:

- Ten Strategies to Promote Student-to-Student Interaction
  1. Ensure rich social environment for students.
  2. Highlight student and peers similarities.
  3. If people speak to the student with a disability through the TA, TA should re-direct conversation to the student.
  4. Teach and practice interaction skills in natural settings.
  5. Use instructional strategies that promote interaction, e.g., partners, small groups (rather than always 1:1 instruction)
  6. Teach other students how to interact with the student with a disability.
  7. Reward appropriate social behavior.
  8. Give student responsibilities that let them interact with peers.
  9. Systematically fade direct TA support to the student.
  10. Make interdependence (rather than dependence) a goal for the student.
  
- Ten Behavioral Supports that are Social (Things students with disabilities can do to develop friends)
  1. Shoot baskets with a peer.
  2. Invite a peer to have lunch together.
  3. Go to a movie after school.
  4. Do a project together during study hall.
  5. Choose 2 friends to have lunch with a teacher.
  6. Play an instructional game (e.g., math) with other students.
  7. Play a computer game with other students.
  8. Pop popcorn with a peer and share with the class.
  9. Read with a friend in the library.
  10. Play a game of Uno with a friend “against” an adult (teacher, TA, principal)
  
- Ten Interactive Student Responsibilities (Things students with disabilities as partners with friends)
  1. Take books back to the library.
  2. Recycle.
  3. Straighten books or instructional materials.
  4. Put materials in office or classroom mailboxes.
  5. Water plants.
  6. Prepare snacks.
  7. Pass out papers.
  8. Collect homework, books, or music.
  9. Buy supplies for a class.
  10. Sharpen pencils.

★ Giangreco, M.F., Yuan, S., McKenzie, B., Cameron, P. and Fialka, J. (2005) **Be careful what you wish for...Five reasons to be concerned about the assignment of individual paraprofessionals.** *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(5), 28-34. Common reasons for requesting individual TA support for students with disabilities who are placed for all or part of their day in general education relate to concerns about how the student will be accepted, treated, supported and instructed in those settings or how the teacher will manage instruction for the student with a disability along with instruction for the rest of the class. Research has shown that individualized TA supports are/can be very beneficial for students when such individualized support is use appropriately. This individualized support may be provided by a single 1:1 TA or by 2 or more TAs who rotate providing individualized instruction to students so that students do not become too dependent on one adult and so that some of the other unintended negative effects of 1:1 TA use can be avoided. Individualized support can also be provided through means other than TAs, e.g., the child’s teacher or peer and other natural supports. (RI’s TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta) on the Resources Webpage has a form for a Decision-Making Model for Natural Supports and/or Supplementary Aides or Services that can be useful in this regard.)

Research (including a number of studies cited in this handout on the Effective Use of Teacher Assistants) shows that when 1:1 TAs are used inappropriately, this is cause for concern. The authors identify “five reasons, based on recent research regarding paraprofessionals in inclusive schools, that professionals and parents alike should be concerned about the assignment of individual paraprofessionals”.

1. The least qualified staff members are teaching students with the most complex learning characteristics. Sometimes, TAs become the primary teachers of the students, making most of the day-to-day instructional and curricular decisions when, in fact, they lack the academic content needed to provide appropriate subject matter instruction.
2. Using 1:1 TAs can have intended negative effects, e.g., isolation from and interference with interactions with other students; dependence on an adult even for tasks that the student may be able to learn or do with less or no support; student feeling stigmatized; loss of personal control or gender identity (e.g., male student taken to female bathroom); or behavior problems resulting from some of these other negative effects.
3. The student has a greater likelihood of limited access to instruction from and interactions with the teacher when the TA is always/mostly in close proximity to the student.
4. Teachers, parents, and students may not be getting what they deserve and expect. 1:1 TAs serving students with disabilities in inclusive settings may get only minimal or no supervision or direction. Teachers may not be trained on how to effectively use TAs. Because 1:1 TAs may lack knowledge and skills of the subject matter in the general education class, the student’s instruction may be individualized BUT not of quality and intensity desired to meet individual student goals.
5. 1:1 TA use may be an “easy fix” to avoid dealing for effectively and comprehensively with instructional issues/program design for general and special education services.

The authors suggest “five initial ideas for educational teams to consider”.

1. Evaluate the way in which students with disabilities are served in general education, focusing on increased involvement of the general education teacher with instruction for students with disabilities. Develop strategies to help special educators better support students in general education. Design more effective ways to provide general and special education teacher supervision and direction to TAs.
2. Evaluate current TA roles and responsibilities and modify as needed to better respond to student needs and research-based effective practice. Analyze what TA tasks, determine if he/she has the knowledge and skills to perform these tasks, and develop a plan to address any gaps. In developing plans and setting expectations for TA practice, ask, “Would the practice be acceptable if the students did not have disabilities?”
3. Collaborate with families to seek to understand their concerns that lead to a request for TA supports and educate them about the various options for providing individualized instruction/support, supports that include, but are not limited to, the assignment of a 1:1 TA. (RI’s TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta) on the Resources Webpage has a form for a Decision-Making Model for Natural Supports and/or Supplementary Aides or Services that can be useful in this regard.)
4. Consider involving students with disabilities in making decisions about their own supports. (RI’s TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta) on the Resources Webpage has a Student Contract form that can be useful in this regard.) “First consider modifying the characteristics of the school, classroom, and staff (e.g., attitudes, teaching formats, student groupings, resource distribution)...to build a stronger classroom community for all types of students.”
5. Do school-wide planning to look at alternatives for providing instruction that is responsive to a broad range of students through the use of a variety of supports including not only TAs but also peer supports, building the capacity of teachers and others in the building to better serve students with disabilities, and resource allocation.

★As educators, we share our perspectives on students with other members of the instructional team. Ever wonder about their perspectives on us? Research on this topic is reported in the journal article: Broer, S.M., Doyle, M.B. and Giangreco, M.F. (2005, Summer) **Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional support.** *Exceptional Children*, 71(4), 415-29. The researchers studied the perspectives of young adults with intellectual disabilities regarding their experiences as students with TAs supporting them in general education classes. Their

perspectives of TA support fell into 4 categories: TA as (1) mother, (2) friend, (3) protector from bullying, and (4) primary teacher. In some instances, these experiences were positive. However, in other instances, the 1:1 TA made the student feel like (1) he/she "had a baby sitter" who interfered with the student's ability to develop friendship or to become independent because the TA "did everything" for the student including things that the student could do or needed to learn to do for him/herself or (2) the teacher didn't have enough time to provide help to the student and thus, in reality, the TA and not the teacher was directing instruction. Some former students reported that their TAs actually did their class assignments for them in whole or in part. Recommendations were as follows:

1. Schools should evaluate their existing TA service delivery system to determine if students perceive TAs to be unnecessarily motherly/parental. As part of this evaluation, consider both TA attitude and structure (e.g., rotating TAs/using more than 1 TA to provide individualized support for a particular student so that the student learns to interact with more than one adult). Consider greater use of peer supports in place of or to augment TA support, moving toward helping the student to become as independent as possible. (RI's TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta) on the Resources Webpage has a form for a Decision-Making Model for Natural Supports and/or Supplementary Aides or Services that can be useful in this regard.)
2. Give students with disabilities age-appropriate input into decisions about supports he/she needs and teach the student to self-advocate. (RI's TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta) on the Resources Webpage has a Student Contract form that can be useful in this regard.)
3. Develop strategies to facilitate the development of friendships among students with disabilities and peers who do not have disabilities, e.g., in-class partnering and small group activities, more formalized peer-support programs, co-curricular activities, and training TAs to facilitate such interactions.
4. School leaders should facilitate the development of knowledge and skills among general education teachers regarding appropriate instructional strategies/responsibilities related to students with disabilities in their classes who are supported by TAs.

★Chopra, Rita V. et al (2004). **The paraprofessional role of connector.** *Remedial & Special Education*, 25(4), 219-231, presents research on paraeducator/TA perceptions of their role in connecting school & community. TAs often live in the same community as their students & are able to build on close relationships that they have with students & parents to be linguistic & cultural connectors between parents & teachers, parents & community services, students & teachers, student & parents, & students & their peers. TAs should be trained to use specific strategies to support connecting the student & curriculum to support student achievement, e.g., as a connector between the ESL teacher & other teachers. The TA may be the only person in the student's immediate educational environment who is fluent in a student or parent's native language – thus, playing a key communication connector role. The emphasis on "connector" is important, because the TA should not replace the teacher in student/teacher, parent/teacher, ESL teacher/other school staff or school/community relationships, but rather use his/her linguistic & cultural expertise to serve as a bridge to support effective partnerships. The TA's role as connector is supported by (1) a positive school environment based on respect, trust & appreciation, (2) clearly defined roles & responsibilities for TAs & teachers & PD in this regard for both, & (3) appropriate training needed for TAs to support instruction (both PD & ongoing on-the-job training through appropriate teacher direction & supervision [an area in which teachers need PD too]), to serve as a connector, to deal with confidentiality/setting appropriate boundaries for information sharing), etc.

★Giangreco, M. F. (2003). **Working with paraprofessionals.** *Educational Leadership*, 61(2), 50-53. IDEA allows appropriately trained TAs to assist in the instruction of students with disabilities under the direction and supervision of qualified professionals. "Effective inclusion of students with disabilities requires concerted effort and collaboration among the IEP team: teachers, special educators, families and administrators and (if appropriate) this team can benefit from carefully designed paraprofessional support." (p. 50) Key elements of such support resulting in effective inclusion & TA use include the following.

- Regular education teacher engagement - Teachers are effectively engaged with all students including students with disabilities. They collaborate actively with special educators & TAs including mentoring the TAs, maintaining ongoing communication & phasing out TA support when it is no longer needed

for particular students as the IEP team assists the student in becoming increasingly independent regarding the skills that are the focus of instruction. Unfortunately, sometimes the presence of a TA may result in the teacher becoming less engaged with the student than they really need to be in order for the student to be successful in inclusive environments. *Considerations to ensure effective TA assignment* include:

- "Hiring the most talented, caring & competent (TAs) available;
  - Demonstrating appreciation & respect for their work...;
  - Orienting them to the school, classroom, & students;
  - Clarifying their roles & assigning them tasks that align with their skills;
  - Providing initial & ongoing training that matches their roles;
  - Giving them professionally prepared plans to follow;
  - Directing their work through ongoing, supportive supervision; &
  - Providing opportunities for them to be contributing team members." (pp. 50-51)
- Avoiding the Training Trap - Regular education teachers should not assume that the TA necessarily has the appropriate scope of knowledge & skills needed to assist in the instruction of students with disabilities related to the specific instructional goals for his/her student/class. Thus, the teacher must provide the TA adequate direction & supervision including ongoing job-embedded PD. In fact, we need to be very deliberate when assigning TAs who are often the least trained & assigned to the most challenging students (See *considerations to ensure effective TA assignment* above). The author contends that regular education teachers "should not underestimate the importance of their existing skills & repertoire for educating students with disabilities. The principles of teaching & learning do not change when a student is labeled with a disability. Teachers can be successful by stretching, individualizing, & intensifying many of the same approaches that they have used for years" & providing direction & supervision in this regard to TAs. (p. 51).
  - Role of Special Educators - Special Educators should maintain instructional responsibilities for students assigned to them & ensure that TAs are not put in positions with expectations for "inappropriate autonomy" (p. 52) as they assist with instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive settings.
  - Realistic Expectations - TAs need not only knowledge & skills related to assisting with instruction but also related to the content areas associated with this instruction. Recent research suggests that this may be a problem for some TAs, particularly those assigned to middle & high school assisting "across the curriculum" in classes where the TA does not have subject matter expertise. "Instead, the classroom teacher, special educator, & (TA) should meet to plan how to include the student with a disability in group lessons & to identify individually appropriate learning outcomes that are clearly understood by all team members. Next, the teacher & special educator can determine the student's need for differentiated expectations, instruction, materials, & assignments as well as ways in which the (TA) can help implement such differentiation. Educators may also consider modifying their school's service delivery practices so that (TAs), especially secondary, are assigned to a limited number of subjects in which they can gain content proficiency." (p. 52).
  - Unintended Effects & Alternative Supports - Assigning a TA to support students with disabilities can sometimes have unintended negative effects. For example, seating a student with a disability on the periphery of the classroom with a TA in close proximity may lead to social isolation from other students or cause the student to feel stigmatized. It can cause the student to become overly dependent on the TA related to social, behavioral &/or academic/developmental skills. These unintended consequences can be minimized by seating the student with a disability among other students & having the proximity of the TA within the classroom as far away from the student as feasible depending on the student's need. It may be possible to include the student in the discussion of how much TA support he or she really needs. In addition to TA supports, the instructional team can consider the use of other more natural supports such as cooperative learning groups & peer tutoring.

★Giangreco, M.E., Edelman, S.W., and Broer, S.M. (2003). **Schoolwide planning to improve paraeducator supports.** *Exceptional Children*, 70 (1), 63-79. What can your school do to support TAs? A recent study chronicled a planning process to support TAs in 46 schools in 13 states and surveyed 331 instructional team members: 125 TAs, 61 general education teachers, 59 special educators, 27 parents, 36 principals, 12 related service providers, and 11 others. Each school used a 27-page booklet, *A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports* (see website) to plan TA supports. The guide has

self-assessment ratings on 28 indicators of TA support. Most frequently identified priorities in this study were: (a) orientation and entry-level training; (b) on-the-job training to match responsibilities; (c) accurate job descriptions; (d) substitute TAs recruited and trained; and (e) access to ongoing training. Most believed that using this guide, prioritizing TA needs and implementing findings would lead to improved student outcomes and reduced risks associated with over or inappropriate TA use. To learn more, go to <http://uvm.edu/~cdci/paraprep> and <http://uvm.edu/~cdci/parasupport/guide.html>.

★Giangreco, M.F., Broer, S. M., Edelman, S. W. (1999). **The tip of the iceberg: Determining whether paraprofessional support is needed for students with disabilities in general education settings.** *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (JASH)* 24 (4), 281-291. Researchers have studied when and how to use paraprofessionals effectively in schools. A 1999 study of paraprofessional supports for students with disabilities in general education settings asked:

1. Have professionals delegated too much responsibility to teacher assistants?
2. Are paraprofessionals “The Way” to include students with disabilities?
3. The conclusion, “Deciding whether an individual paraprofessional is needed to support the education of a student with a disability seems like a such a simple decision, but it really is just the tip of the iceberg.” (p. 289).

The authors suggest several considerations for deciding whether paraprofessional supports are needed:

1. Rely on collaborative teamwork, including the student with a disability.
2. Build capacity in the school to support **all** students.
3. Consider paraprofessional supports individually and judiciously.
4. Clarify the reasons why paraprofessional supports are being considered.
5. See a match between identified support needs and the skills of the person who will provide the supports.
6. Explore opportunities for natural supports.
7. Consider reducing special educator and related services caseloads.
8. Consider various school and classroom characteristics.
9. Consider if paraprofessional support is a temporary measure.

★Rogan, P.M. & Held, M. (1999). **Paraprofessionals in job coach roles.** *The Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24 (4), 273-280 examines issues of TAs in job coach roles for students with disabilities. Students’ post-school outcomes are partially dependent on the supports they receive during this critical time. Article recommendations align with RI’s state Guidelines for TAs Assisting with Community-Based Instruction.

1. Develop accurate job descriptions outlining both school and community duties that promote student self-determination and independence /interdependence while facilitating the use of natural supports on the job.
2. Recruit TAs with appropriate attitudes and skills re: students with disabilities, maturity, strong interpersonal and problem solving skills and experience in the business world and community connections.
3. Interview using appropriate questions, teachers and vocational personnel and have finalists shadow staff to ensure they understand the job.
4. Conduct formal orientation and provide ongoing PD.
5. Have pay incentives based on experience, credentials and performance.
6. Include TAs as integral part of the transition team, involving them in planning and ongoing regular communication.
7. Ensure that teachers know how to effectively train and supervise TAs and give regular feedback on performance.
8. TAs should shift from a more traditional 1:1 role that may lead to student isolation. Instead, they should be in tune with how businesses work and serve as a facilitator building the capacity of businesses to support a diverse workforce.
9. Train TAs on data recording and communication to team.

Topic: **Teacher Assistant Professional Development**

See also research at the beginning of this handout under Topic: **TA Use Linked to Student Achievement.**

★Cobb, Charlene. (2007) **Training paraprofessionals to effectively work with all students.** *The Reading Teacher*, 60(7), 686-689. This article recognizes the vital role TAs can play in assisting with literacy achievement for all students. The International Reading Association (IRA) Standards for Reading Professionals (access at <http://www.reading.org/downloads/resources/545standards2003/index.html>) include expectations for both reading professionals and TAs related to:

- ★Foundational knowledge
- ★Instructional strategies and curriculum materials
- ★Assessment, diagnosis and evaluation
- ★Creating a literate environment
- ★Professional development

The author describes a cost effective PD series that a reading specialist can easily customize to his/her program/student population. It has 3 components:

- ★Needs Assessment – Survey teachers to find out which reading strategies they use most often. Use this information to decide on the content of your TA PD.
- ★TA PD – Plan sessions, usually 45-60 minutes each, 1 topic per session, e.g., fluency, word study, comprehension, etc. The agenda outline: background, explanation/rationale for instructional strategies, practical applications, paired or small group practice, debrief and discussion of application to their settings. Have handouts & encourage TAs to put in a notebook for easy reference.
- ★Follow-up and Consultation – Give teachers explanation of TA PD including any handouts, e.g., at a staff meeting or via email. During future TA PD, debrief on strategies they tried and offer consultation as needed. At some point, e.g., semester end, gather feedback from teachers on TA PD impact and additional TA PD needs.

★Keller, C.L., Bucholz, J., & Brady, M.P. (2007) **Yes, I can! Empowering paraprofessionals to teach learning strategies.** *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 39(3), 18-23. This article underscores the necessity of providing appropriate professional development for paraprofessionals in order for them to be able to assist teachers in addressing the needs of students with diverse abilities and learning styles. Paraprofessionals need core competencies related to (a) roles and responsibilities, (b) learner characteristics, (c) cultural diversity, (d) data collection, (e) behavioral strategies, (f) instructional strategies and (g) health-related issues and procedures. They must also receive professional development to teach them to perform specific tasks related to their job assignment. The authors contend that it is essential to teacher paraprofessionals “learning strategies” including (a) rehearsal, (b) elaboration and (c) organization. They note that such strategies help all students with information retention and also with improved attitudes and motivation for learning; moreover, these strategies are particularly critical for students who are low-achieving and who have disabilities. The authors describe a 2-day professional development activity designed to develop these competencies with paraprofessionals. Day 1 focused on learning different learning strategies and their importance. Each paraprofessional developed an original strategy to use with an individual student or small group using the CREATE model:

- Choose a learning outcome or goal.
- Remember to task analyze.
- Eagerly put the steps in sequential order.
- Always make it simple and easy to remember.
- Try to choose action words that match your title (topic related to the skill/behavior addressed by the strategy) by using synonyms.
- Extend learning by making a cue card for students to use independently.”

The article provided several examples of strategies the paraprofessionals developed. The following is one example used for reading. The strategy was named “SOUND”:

- Sound it out.

- Open your eyes, and look at the pictures.
- Use context clues.
- Now chunk the word.
- Don't give up."

Following Day 1, the paraprofessionals implemented the learning strategy each had developed and maintained data on student impact. On Day 2 (a week and a half following Day 1), the paraprofessionals shared their experiences. Their experiences were very positive related to student impact and also the paraprofessionals competence and confidence in strategy use. Teachers with whom the paraprofessionals worked also reported positively.

★Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (2005). ***Beyond compliance: preparing highly qualified paraeducators***. Belmont, MA: Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. This report provided results of a survey of 44 states and 79 districts (35 urban/44 rural). Based on survey findings, the report recommends that states and districts:

1. Improve data collection mechanisms to document training taken and training needs and to report accurate TA use data.
2. Develop system-wide professional development based on competency-based standards developed through collaboration among key stakeholders.
3. Devise comprehensive professional development programs that specifically meet the needs of adult learners.
4. Offer incentives for teacher assistants to pursue training.

★Carroll, D. (2001). **Considering paraeducator training, roles and responsibilities**. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 34 (2), 60-64 identifies various recommended procedures for training TAs. Training begins with the interview process itself in which basic job expectations are clarified. Orientation should start before the TA starts work in the classroom and continue on as the TA acclimates to the job. Once on the job, the supervising teacher should attend to ongoing knowledge and skill development specific to the TA's assignment through routine information sharing and regular meetings to plan and evaluate instruction and ensure effective teamwork and communication. In this regard, the supervising teacher may be the actual "TA trainer" through providing instruction, modeling and feedback related to needed TA skills. In other instances, the training may be offered through training sessions offered by the school/district. Depending on the nature of the TA's assignment, skill development may include skills needed to support students in inclusive settings, in more specialized settings, in interpersonal/social relationships, in daily living, and/or in community and independent living/domestic skills.

★Riggs, C.G. (2001). **Ask the paraprofessionals: What are your training needs**. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33 (3), 78-83 reports the results of research related to teacher assistant training. Teacher assistants come to their jobs from a variety of backgrounds. In the majority of states where there is not mandated pre-employment training, many teacher assistants have no training before beginning their classroom duties. Once on the job, many receive only limited training that is sporadic and rarely part of a comprehensive professional development program designed to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed for their particular assignments. Teacher assistants identified the following professional development needs: knowledge of specific disabilities, behavior management, working with other adults, inclusive practices, communication, learning styles, special education law, how to handle various classroom situations, instructional strategies, roles and responsibilities, technology, confidentiality, and health and safety. The author recommends a comprehensive training plan for teacher assistants that includes: district-wide orientation and training topics; core training applicable to all teacher assistants (such as that covered in RIDE's approved TA Training Program required for all TAs hired after January 1, 1999 as a condition of their employment), and training for teacher assistants specific to their particular assignments.

★National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1998) **Learning Disabilities: Use of Paraprofessionals**. Rockville, MD: National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. This report provides recommendations regarding the use of paraprofessionals with students who have learning disabilities. It discusses (a) foundations for successful paraprofessional services, (b) ethical

responsibilities, (c) education requirements for paraprofessionals, (d) roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in a learning disabilities program, (e) activities outside the scope of responsibilities for paraprofessionals, (f) responsibilities of the qualified teacher/service provider with regard to use of paraprofessionals, and (g) guidelines for supervision of paraprofessionals. These recommendations are consistent with RI State Standards and Guidelines that are available on the TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta), Legal Requirements webpage. In addition, the report appends recommended competencies for paraprofessionals serving students with disabilities. The following are competency grouping omitting specific competencies that appear in the report under each “lettered” item.

1. “Interpersonal Skills (Communicates honestly, clearly, accurately, coherently, and concisely)
  - a. Deals effectively with attitudes and behaviors of the individual with learning disabilities
  - b. Uses appropriate language (written and oral) in dealing with the individual with learning disabilities and other
  - c. Deals effectively with supervisor
2. Personal Qualities
  - a. Manages time effectively
  - b. Demonstrates appropriate conduct
3. Technical Skills
  - a. Maintains a facilitating environment for assigned tasks
  - b. Uses time effectively
  - c. Prepares and presents materials effectively
  - d. Maintains records
  - e. Provides assistance to the teacher/service provider
4. Screening (If an appropriate activity for the profession where paraprofessionals are used)
  - a. Demonstrates knowledge and use of a variety of screening tools and protocols
  - b. Demonstrates appropriate administration and scoring of screening tools
  - c. Manages screenings and documentation
  - d. Communicates screening results and all supplemental information to supervisor for interpretation and decision-making
5. Instructional Assistance/Intervention
  - a. Performs tasks as outlined and instructed by the supervisor
  - b. Demonstrates skills in managing behavior and intervention program
  - c. Demonstrates knowledge of education/intervention objectives and individual plan

Topic: <b><i>National Trends and State Practices re: Teacher Assistants (TAs)</i></b>
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★**Description and Employment Criteria of Instructional Paraprofessionals**, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2007, June). Retrieved June 25, 2007 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007008>. “This Issue Brief (1) offers a descriptive portrait of the distribution of instructional paraprofessionals in all public elementary and secondary schools by instructional responsibility and selected school characteristics and (2) examines the educational attainment criteria used by school districts in hiring these paraprofessionals. Data for this analysis were drawn from the 2003–04 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The findings from this analysis indicate that 91 percent of public elementary and secondary schools in the United States had at least one instructional paraprofessional on staff in 2003–04. A greater percentage of traditional public schools than charter schools had instructional paraprofessionals and a greater percentage of elementary schools than secondary schools report having instructional paraprofessionals.” In this NCES study, 89.3% of the schools in the Northeast employed instructional TAs in 2003-04 and of this number, 76.3% of these schools assigned TAs with responsibilities in special education. As cited in the “Report of Teacher Assistant Assignments and Qualifications in RI School Districts and Other Educational Programs by the RI Department of Education - January 2007”, in RI in Fall 2006, 3045 persons were employed as paraprofessionals, 89% of whom were instructional teacher assistants (TAs), 9% were non-instructional TAs and 2% were other paraprofessionals, e.g., therapy assistants. Of those persons employed as instructional TAs in RI, 77% served children with disabilities.

★The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has an online-only practitioner’s journal called TECPlus that expands the content of one of CEC’s journals, *Teaching Exceptional Children* (TEC). Explore this

resource at <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus>. By typing in a keyword(s) into the "Search" box and clicking on "Go", you can see the names of a variety of articles. Then, click on the article title and you can see an article abstract or download the entire article. Here are some of the titles you get by searching for Teacher Assistants or Paraprofessionals or Paraeducators:

1. Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals: In Their Own Words
2. Teaching Self-Determination to Early Elementary Students
3. Making Morning Circle Meaningful
4. Empowering Students with Special Needs to Help Others: How Problem Based Learning Made It Possible
5. Perspectives of Effective Teachers of Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities
6. Inclusion: A Catalyst for School Reform

For example, in one article there, Tobin, R. (2006). Five ways to facilitate the teacher assistant's work in the classroom. *Teaching Exceptional Children PLUS*, 2 (6), the author discusses a study that concluded that teachers can facilitate TAs by (1) focusing on teacher/TA relationships, (2) monitoring teacher talk and affording mini-lessons, (3) using differentiation and universal design, (4) having clear teacher/TA roles, and (5) using an action-oriented communication agenda.

Of course, you can search for many topics on TECPlus: autism, reading, learning disabilities, behavior, response to intervention...and much more. **CHECK IT OUT!**

★In 2005, the **Education Commission of the States (ECS)** established an on-line interactive **paraprofessional database** that provides information on each state's response to NCLB requirements and paraprofessional/teacher assistant policies. ECS has compiled research from each of the 50 states regarding TA certification and qualification requirements, TA professional development and assessment tests and passing scores for those tests, which are accepted and designated by states. It confirms that the most common state assessment being used in states is the ParaPro – just as we are doing here in RI. The database is on the ECS web site at [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org). The website provides 3 documents:

- Baber, A. (2005). **Paraprofessional database research navigator**. Education Commission of the States: Denver, CO
- Campbell, K. (2005). **ECS statenote: professional development for paraprofessionals across the states**. Education Commission of the States: Denver, CO.
- Mikulecky, M.T. & Baber, A. (2005) **ECS Policy Brief: From highly qualified to highly competent paraprofessionals: How NCLB requirements can catalyze effective program and policy development**. Education Commission of the States: Denver, CO.

ECS recognizes RI's TA initiative as a leader among states

- 1 of 5 states that has the same qualifications for all instructional TAs
- 1 of 11 states with state level TA professional development programs
- 1 of 12 states with TA requirements that exceed basic federal minimums
- The report names 11 states that require instructional TAs to be state certified. While RIDE does not certify TAs per se, the database notes that RIDE ensures TAs are qualified with a process other than certification:
  - Approving pre-employment TA training programs that TAs are required to take
  - Requiring employers to ensure TAs meet qualifications
  - Having an annual TA survey of employers to report on TA policies and procedures for complying with TA qualifications requirements

The ECS Policy Brief, *From highly qualified to highly competent paraprofessionals: How NCLB requirements can catalyze effective program and policy development*, provides recommendations from an expert panel related to using a varied group of stakeholders to establish state and local infrastructures to address: (1) defining roles of paraeducators, (2) articulating knowledge and skills for paraeducators, teachers, principals and district administrators and including these in job descriptions and career lattices, (3) providing professional development, and (4) developing career lattices that move both horizontally and vertically that are accompanied by increased pay, leadership opportunities and/or job security.

★Pardini, P. (2005, Summer) **Stretching to the Next Rung**. *Journal of Staff Development*, 26(3), 14-18 cites RI as a leader in policy and supports for TAs in an article. The article interviewed Anna Lou Pickett, former director of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals, who talked about the importance of states having systems to support TAs. States have responded to the needs of effective TA policy and practice and the mandates of NCLB in varying ways – some better than others. The article quotes, “One state Pickett isn’t worried about is Rhode Island, where laws governing the employment, use, and training of teacher assistants have been on the books since 1997. But Rhode Island didn’t stop there.” The article goes on to discuss RI TA standards, pre-employment training requirements and resources as well as ongoing professional development requirements and our TA networks. The article refers readers to our TA website. It provides information on the Cranston Public Schools and Northern RI Collaborative’s pre-employment TA Training Program. The article also provides information on the state of Washington and a school district in Oregon.

★Research is showing what we already know in RI - the role of TAs is now primarily instructional support as opposed to a time when TA roles were more clerical. Results of a U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs study found that most special education TAs spend 85-90% of their time in instructional activities under the direction of teachers/licensed staff (ERIC/OSEP Special Project (Spring 2003). **Paraeducators: Providing support to students with disabilities and their teachers.** *Research Connections in Special Education* (No. 12). Arlington, VA: The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education). Typical duties are tutoring individuals or groups, gathering data, implementing behavior management plans, preparing materials, and meeting with teachers. The increasing reliance on TAs in such an important instructional role linked to promoting student achievement makes it critical that programs ensure that teachers, TAs and administrators are aware of how to use TAs effectively. The study identified these TA supports integral to quality education: role clarification via meaningful job descriptions; role alignment with TA skills; job orientation; ongoing professional development for TAs and for teachers on working with TAs; TA supervision and performance evaluation; and providing adequate planning time/communication strategies for teacher/TA teams. These important issues are addressed in RI State Standards and Guidelines that are available on the TA website at [www.ritap.org/ta](http://www.ritap.org/ta), Legal Requirements webpage.