Paraprofessional
Pockets of Excellence

Change is inevitable. Just look at the planet we live on, it travels at a rate of 66,000 miles per hour in its ellipse around the sun, with a population of over 5 billion people. (Seward, 1994) Given these dynamics alone, change is inevitable. No one understands this phenomenon of change better than paraprofessionals and those who direct the work of paraprofessionals. The role of the para is almost certain an ever changing one. Currently, the paraprofessional is becoming an increasingly integral member of the educational team in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Last spring the Minnesota Statewide Paraprofessional Consortium identified schools around Minnesota that have been exemplary in implementing workable strategies that meet the changing role of the paraprofessional. Through a nomination and selection process, nine schools were identified as using effective strategies or practices to support, train, supervise, plan with, and retain paraprofessionals. This issue of the ParaLink features profiles of each of the nine schools and their Pocket of Excellence.

We congratulate these schools, and hope that this issue of the ParaLink will be a useful resource. You may also view the following Pockets of Excellence profiles on the Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium Web site at www.ici.coled.umn.edu/para/

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Pockets of Excellence

Bloomington Public Schools

Exemplary Strategy
Role Practice

Setting
Bloomington Public Schools
5900 Portland Avenue
Bloomington, MN 55420
(612) 885-8610
K - 12th grade
118 paraprofessionals
in the school
1400 students working with paraprofessionals

Contact
Marcia Engle, Special Education Coordinator, (612) 885-8610

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is enhancement of the paraprofessional role by the creation of a Special Education Paraprofessional Advisory Committee to address staff development needs and provide feedback to the school district on paraprofessional issues.

Description of Exemplary Strategy
The Student Services department provides a preschool workshop for licensed and non-licensed staff to promote wellness and a positive collegial atmosphere. At a workshop in 1994, paraprofessionals were asked to share issues and staff development needs. A letter was then sent to all paraprofessionals asking for volunteers to form a Special Education Paraprofessional Advisory Committee. An ongoing emphasis is to have membership that reflects the diversity of roles paraprofessionals are given. This initial brainstorming session provided the beginning focus of this committee. Goals based on input, solicited through surveys of paraprofessionals, were developed. In addition to paraprofessional membership on the committee the district made the commitment that a Special Education Coordinator would participate on the committee, and staff development funds were allocated to the committee, which met monthly. The staff development activities planned by this committee occurred on workshop days, during after school in-services, and on one Saturday each spring. The activities provided were available to all special education paraprofessionals in the school district. District level in-services were expanded to include all district paraprofessionals. The feedback they provided to district administration helped shape paraprofessional policies and practices.

Role of the Paraprofessional
Paraprofessionals determined the needs for this committee and developed and implemented the action plans. It provides opportunities for paraprofessional leadership, and expansion of skills and knowledge. It also addresses wellness and provides opportunities for dialogue and networking with colleagues. Issues that this committee have assisted the district with include new employee training, a paraprofessional handbook and development of a reference library.

Impact on Students
As a result of this committee’s work, paraprofessionals are in a more professional environment with a better opportunity to improve their skills and increase their knowledge on topics related to student needs.

What Makes it Work?
The success of the committee is due to the willingness of staff to participate and develop activities, the support of building administrators to provide coverage and/or release time so paraprofessionals can attend meetings, and the financial contribution of district support for funding.
Overview of Exemplary Strategy

The exemplary strategies used in this Pocket of Excellence are the enhancing of collaborative relationships between paraprofessionals and teachers through staff development opportunities, and the training and advancement of paraprofessionals.

Description of Exemplary Strategy

District 877 recognized that paraprofessionals serve as integral building and district team members. The increase in total classified staff, as well as the growing diversity of roles and functions that paraprofessionals perform, necessitated that quality training be made available.

First, District 877 put together a staff development concept and got Board approval. Then they surveyed paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators regarding needs and interests. Next, they negotiated language into the paraprofessional Master Agreement regarding staff development and competencies. A committee representing paraprofessionals and administrators designed the final program.

The following is a comprehensive staff development plan for the district paraprofessionals. It was developed cooperatively by administration and representatives from the districts paraprofessionals.

The Plan

The plan meets current training needs, provides clear standards for accountability, and assesses future training to meet district and building goals. It requires the following—

- Staff development to achieve entry level competencies at a minimum of 6 hours each year the first two years of employment.
- All paraprofessionals to attend a minimum of 6 hours of staff development each year beyond the first two years of employment.
- Paraprofessionals to meet advanced competencies in order to advance on the salary schedule as outlined in the Paraprofessional Quality Earning Program. This includes student relations, professionalism, teaming, instructional strategies, technology, and health and safety.

The district put together a paraprofessional staff development planning committee of 15 people. The paraprofessionals in this district find that this training program helps them in developing and enhancing their skills.

Role of the Paraprofessional

The paraprofessional becomes the learner, gaining skills and applying those skills to the educational setting. There are six main competencies that have been identified that paraprofessionals are expected to gain proficiency in throughout the course of their employment. Year three and beyond provides paraprofessionals with the opportunity to design their plan in cooperation with their supervising teacher.

Impact on Students

Paraprofessionals work with students in a variety of educational settings. They are directly impacting student education by attending training in each competency area. This increases the skills that paraprofessionals have in working in these competency areas, resulting in improved student learning and a quality education.
What Makes it Work?
The program was designed by and for paraprofessionals. Ongoing program evaluation will be conducted to insure program effectiveness and to meet the future needs of the paraprofessionals working in this district.

Chaska Middle School

Exemplary Strategy
Collaborative Practice

Setting
Chaska Middle School
1600 Park Ridge Drive
Chaska, MN  55318
(612) 448-8700
12 – 14 year olds
4 paraprofessionals
in the school
24 students working with paraprofessionals

Contact
Gale Brown, Special Educator,
(612) 448-8700

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is the strengthening of collaborative relationships between paraprofessionals and teachers through workshops that prepare paraprofessionals for the upcoming school year and their responsibilities. The workshops facilitate communication between paraprofessionals and teachers, enhancing their ability to work together as a team to ensure high-quality services to their students.

Description of Exemplary Strategy
The school holds half-day workshops for paraprofessionals in the fall before the first week of school. The focus is on helping the paraprofessionals to feel comfortable with students with special needs by telling them beforehand with whom they will be working, vital information about the student, and in what classes and programs they will be working. The workshops also set the stage for closer collaboration throughout the year between paraprofessionals and teachers.

Paraprofessional input was important when deciding what issues and areas needed to be discussed and reviewed during the workshop hours. The following is a list of topics and issues that are discussed, reviewed and planned for during the half-day workshops—

• Paraprofessionals give input as to what grade level and students they would like to work with that year. They may also request what classes they would like to be in, depending on what the needs are and how the students can be best supported.

• Paraprofessionals are given a copies of their students’ IEPs and an information sheet that contains important facts about the student.

• Expectations are clarified: (a) What the role of the paraprofessional is and what is expected from this role; (b) What paraprofessionals should expect from their students; and (c) What the classroom teachers are expecting from paraprofessionals and students.

• The students’ schedules are looked at and paraprofessionals can see what their daily routine will look like.

• Labels, strategies, and syndromes are reviewed, and any new information on the topics that are pertinent to students and the program are shared.

• Policies are discussed by the case manager to give paraprofessionals the support they may need in making decisions throughout the school year.

Role of the Paraprofessional
The workshops bring the paraprofessionals into contact with other staff with which they will share mutual support in their work throughout the year, strengthening their sense of connection and teamwork. The orientation to the upcoming year also enables the paraprofessionals to approach the year with greater confidence and preparation.
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Impact on Students
This collaboration practice greatly enhances the quality of education that students receive because paraprofessionals gain confidence in themselves and in their abilities, and this is transferred over to the students.

What Makes it Work?
This practice works because paraprofessionals are valued and take ownership in the program that is developed. The program builds trust in each other, as well as loyalty and friendships, and improves education for the students because the cycle of collaboration continues.

Chiron Middle School

Exemplary Strategy
Role Practice
Setting
Chiron Middle School
25 North 16th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55403
(612) 627-3250
6th - 8th grade
3 paraprofessionals in the school
200 students working with paraprofessionals

Contact
Lynn Iverson, Principal, (612) 627-3250

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is the enhancement and diversification of the paraprofessional role through involvement in after-school activities with students.

Description of Exemplary Strategy
Paraprofessionals in the school asked for additional opportunities to work with students in after-school activities. After-school activities and events impact students and their daily lives. The following are after-school activities held at Chiron Middle School: Chess Club, Homework and Hoops study club, and Mediation, a daily activity that involves students helping peers solve conflicts and resolve problems. Each of the school’s three paraprofessional supervises and advises students in these after-school activities.

Role of the Paraprofessional
This practice helps build relationships with paraprofessionals and students and expands the paraprofessional role beyond disciplining, tutoring, administrative, or recess/lunch supervisor roles. For the paraprofessionals, it builds self-confidence and a stronger sense of role at the school.

Impact on Students
Additional involvement with the paraprofessionals strengthens students’ sense of membership in a school community and of the reliability of caring adults. This bears positively on student achievement.

What Makes it Work?
Paraprofessional persistence, altruism and willingness to take on roles beyond their immediate job descriptions makes this strategy successful.

Hale School

Exemplary Strategy
Collaborative Practice
Setting
Hale School
1220 East 54th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55417
(612) 627-2387
K - 3rd grades
8 paraprofessionals in the school
630 students working with paraprofessionals

Contact
Bob Brancale, Assistant Principal, (612) 627-2387

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is strengthening collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers through use of a collaborative effort form. The purpose of the form is threefold—

• To improve communication between teachers and paraprofessionals.
• To create a classroom environment where students thrive.
Pockets of Excellence

- To have paraprofessionals and teachers communicate issues such as discipline, special needs of certain students, and academic expectations.

Description of Exemplary Strategy
This school developed a collaborative effort form to connect teachers and paraprofessionals. Teachers and paraprofessionals who work on common goals with similar styles get positive results, and students feel confident and able to achieve when the adults they work with are consistent and share the same expectations. This form helps facilitate these results, and includes questions such as —
- What is the vision of your school?
- What is the emphasis of your school?
- What does your student population look like?
- What is the discipline policy of your school?
- How are paraprofessionals used in the school?

This form can be used the first month of school. The paraprofessional and teacher team discuss the questions. At least twenty minutes are needed to have meaningful discussion. These questions are revisited again in the spring. Paraprofessional conferences are scheduled with the supervisor after the teacher-paraprofessional meetings to strategize on areas of educational and professional need.

Role of the Paraprofessional
This form provides a paraprofessional forum for discussion. It is used to solidify instructional practice and classroom management practices between the two educators. The paraprofessional and teacher who work together with the same focus and management strategies create a classroom where expectations are clear and behavioral standards are consistently enforced. The paraprofessional learns techniques from the teacher. A colleague-to-colleague relationship is created between teacher and paraprofessional.

Impact on Students
As a result of using this form, common goals are set for the teacher-paraprofessional team, special needs children receive appropriate help, and classroom management is consistent.

What Makes it Work?
The crux of all successful organizations is relationships and communication. This tool works because people talk with each other. The form allows dialogue to flow in a way that focuses on making the classroom setting optimum.

Jefferson Elementary School

Exemplary Strategy
Collaborative Practice

Setting
Jefferson Elementary School
318 South Payne
New Ulm, MN 56073
(507) 359-8460
5th - 8th grades
23 paraprofessionals in the school
72 students working with paraprofessionals

Contact
Tanya S. Schull, Principal,
(507) 359-8460

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is an array of staff development opportunities to enhance the role of the paraprofessionals, and collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers.

Description of Exemplary Strategy
Paraprofessionals were the fastest growing group of new hires in this school district. Through the use of surveys, it was determined that more teacher-paraprofessional collaboration was needed to provide students with optimal learning experiences. The following opportunities were
used to encourage teacher/paraprofessional collaboration—

- Teacher/paraprofessional collaboration training.
- Involvement in hiring of certified and non-certified staff.
- Participation on the leadership team.
- Ongoing staff development opportunities.
- Involvement in building-wide social events.

Role of the Paraprofessional
Paraprofessionals actively participate in staff development opportunities. They are active members of all aspects of the school, including school committees, the leadership team, and the hiring and decision-making process. Paraprofessionals are recognized as experts who can create optimal learning experiences for students. They participate in trainings and workshops in school, where they have opportunities to exchange ideas, express points of view, share feelings, and practice active listening. Paraprofessionals and teachers are able to grow as individuals and team members. This practice enhances the status, professional development and performance of the paraprofessional in the workforce.

Impact on Students
Through assistance from paraprofessionals, students receive more one-on-one interaction with adults. Paraprofessionals can proactively reduce negative classroom behaviors and improve overall learning.

What Makes it Work?
High job satisfaction and performance is a result of clear job expectations and open appreciation of the paraprofessional role. Staff tension is minimal. The inclusion of paraprofessionals in staff development opportunities creates a student focused, caring environment with open communication between all staff members.

Oak Point Intermediate

Exemplary Strategy
Collaborative Practice

Setting
Oak Point Intermediate School
13400 Staring Lake Pkwy
Eden Prairie, MN 55346
(612) 975-7600
5th and 6th grades
17 paraprofessionals in the school
160 students working with paraprofessionals

Contact
Jane Ann Nichols, Lead Special Education Teacher,
(612) 975-7600

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is the enhancing of collaborative relationships, and communication between paraprofessionals and teachers through monthly team meetings. During the meetings, fifth and sixth grade paraprofessionals and teachers discuss issues related to the paraprofessional role in the school environment, including the interactions between paraprofessionals and special needs students, and the needs of paraprofessionals within the classroom and school.

Description of Exemplary Strategy
The Oak Point paraprofessional team developed monthly meetings to communicate needs and concerns between themselves and the teachers. The lead teacher attended these meetings and was the liaison between regular and special education paraprofessionals and the administrative staff. This lead teacher was instrumental in seeking administrative funding and initially facilitating meetings. Paraprofessionals were trained on the facilitation process by a specialized district team. A paraprofessional leadership team of three was then elected by the members to help facilitate and plan meetings.
Format of Team Meetings
• Each leader rotates co-facilitating meetings with lead teacher.
• Monthly meetings held after school, on-site.
• Open attendance is optional; time is paid.
• Agenda is set with specific time allotted for agenda items.
• Minutes are taken by members who rotate that duty.
• A time keeper moves the meeting agenda along.
• Paraprofessionals develop the mission statement and rules.
• Rule rating form is used by members to evaluate meeting.

The first meeting occurs before the school year begins. This orientation session runs two to three hours and includes job responsibilities, training, yearly schedules, and an opportunity to read the student Individualized Educational Plan. New paraprofessionals are assigned mentors to address individual questions or concerns during the year. The paraprofessionals complete a survey designed by the leadership team to gain feedback on how to improve the meetings as well as indicate what worked well during the year. At the end of the year, paraprofessionals indicate general work preferences for the following school year. These meetings provide an opportunity for certified staff and administration to give and receive feedback from the paraprofessional team on various issues.

Paraprofessionals need monthly meetings to communicate and network with each other, support and encourage each other, share curriculum modifications and adaptations, and learn about or engage in opportunities for further training.

Role of the Paraprofessional
Paraprofessionals participate in the monthly meetings by deciding the agenda, co-facilitating the meetings, designing the meeting evaluation surveys, compiling the results, giving teacher feedback, and providing materials and speakers. When training opportunities occur outside the school site, paraprofessionals share what they learned with staff that did not attend.

Impact on Students
Paraprofessionals are more effective as they work with various students with special needs. They share knowledge, materials and strategies, and solve problems together. Students benefit from the collective expertise of the paraprofessionals.

What Makes it Work?
Paraprofessionals have ownership in the structure and content of the meetings, and they have been trained in how to effectively run meetings so that a sense of accomplishment occurs. Members are compensated for their attendance, under the terms of the paraprofessional contract. Administrative support has been a critical factor in establishing these meetings, which meet the needs of the paraprofessionals.

Pockets of Excellence
Make it a practice to keep on the lookout for novel and interesting ideas that others have used successfully. Your idea only has to be original in its adaptation to the problem you are working on.

Thomas Alva Edison
Pockets of Excellence

South Side and Hartley Elementary School

Exemplary Strategy
Collaborative Practice

Setting
South Side and Hartley Elementary School
South State Street
Waseca, MN 56093
(507) 835-1920
Kindergarten – 3rd grade

Contact
Dawn Robertson, 4th Grade Paraprofessional, (507) 835-1920

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is the facilitation of collaborative relationships between paraprofessionals and teachers using an integrated assistant model.

Description of Exemplary Strategy
The integrated assistant model was implemented to accomplish several goals —

- To provide a consistent student-centered service for students.
- To increase pupil contact time by having a support person available more times during the day.
- To increase the communication between support staff and teacher.
- To provide support in the Special Education inclusion process.
- To utilize support staff in a more efficient way.

The school district implemented the model when groups of staff, parents, and administration defined, over a period of years, a need for better communication and more efficient use of time. Duplication of services and a clear line of organizational leadership needed to be focused on, and the groups developed a model to meet identified needs. The model was presented to staff, parents, and the Board of Education. The administration then budgeted for, hired, and scheduled personnel with input from certified staff and paraprofessionals. Finally groups were revisited to discuss options and generate support. The plan was implemented in the fall of 1995.

Paraprofessionals are assigned to classrooms on a 1:2 basis. Each paraprofessional works as a Title 1 assistant, Special Education aide and general classroom support person throughout the day in the two assigned classrooms. Paraprofessionals have the flexibility to provide assistance to all children when the children of need have been served. Parents are extremely supportive of the plan as their children are not asked to leave the room for additional services. Students believe that their need for service is minimal, or nonexistent, and feel boosted in self-worth. Paraprofessionals and teachers work together as a team to make the best possible learning situation for all learners.

Role of the Paraprofessional
One of the greatest benefits is that paraprofessionals became part of the classroom and were able to help students in many subjects that they were not present for before. The paraprofessional’s role is to provide an extra pair of hands and eye, and an extra heart, in the classroom for those who are struggling and have learning, behavioral and/or emotional needs. Paraprofessionals are the key to successful implementation of the plan. They have developed, as a group and individually, into personnel who feel that what they do counts and what they say will be considered as useful suggestions to improve the program. Paraprofessionals are enhanced by this model in many ways. Seeing the classroom teacher present a lesson to the class provides endless learning opportunities for the paraprofessionals. Also, this makes reinforcement of the lesson much easier because the paraprofessionals know exactly how the teacher presented the lesson.
Being in the classroom gives the paraprofessional an unprecedented opportunity to get to know the students’ needs and become more of a working partner in the total educational program.

Impact on Students
Students are often frustrated when they are asked to leave the classroom for supplementary instruction, and feel alienated as they return. Paraprofessionals within the classrooms make it possible for students to remain with their peers on a more consistent basis, enhancing their sense of self-worth and belonging.

What Makes it Work?
This program really works because of the dedication and commitment of the staff to work together to provide the best possible education for the students of our school district. The commitment to solve every problem with a better solution than previously used is essential to making this a success. Everyone is required to be a part of the solution.

Westonka Public Schools
Exemplary Strategy
Role Practice
Setting
Westonka Public Schools
5600 Lynwood Boulevard
Mound, MN 55364
(612) 491-8030
4 - 20 year olds
18 paraprofessionals in the school
300 students working with paraprofessionals
Contact
Emily B. Knight, Director of Special Services, (612) 491-8030

Overview of Exemplary Strategy
The exemplary strategy used in this Pocket of Excellence is the enhancing of the paraprofessional role by the creation of an evaluation tool. The tool was created with the following goals:

• To design a paraprofessional evaluation procedure that involved more stakeholders (i.e. mainstream staff, paraprofessionals and special education staff).
• To develop items on the evaluation instrument that accurately reflect the broad range of responsibilities that paraprofessionals assume.
• To structure the instrument so that there would be feedback opportunities provided for the paraprofessional and the teacher soon after a new position was assumed (40-60 day evaluation).

Description of Exemplary Strategy
The Westonka school district created an instrument to be used to conduct evaluations of paraprofessional job performance. It was created by a team which included the director, paraprofessionals, and special education teachers from the various grade levels. Representation of team members was balanced between the various disability categories. The first step used in creating this instrument was developing a new job description for the position. Second step was to look at the appropriate items for inclusion in an evaluation. The team looked at evaluation instruments that other districts use and shared preliminary drafts at building team meetings during the development process. A great deal of effort went into incorporating the feedback that was received from teachers and paraprofessionals. The instrument is used annually for the evaluation of paraprofessionals and the 40-60 day forms are used less formally after a person has started in a new setting. The tool is used by
mainstream staff, paraprofessionals, special education teachers and the director.

Role of the Paraprofessional
Paraprofessionals complete the questionnaire in preparation for the 40-60 day meeting and prior to the end-of-the-year meeting. Their own “ratings” are discussed along with those of the cooperating teacher. Many times the paraprofessional has unrealistically high expectations for themselves and this provides an opportunity for them to have some feedback about the great work they do. Like many teachers, paraprofessionals often rate themselves lower than do others who work with them. The evaluation tool helps paraprofessionals clarify their roles and responsibilities in a concrete way. Because the instrument was developed specifically for paraprofessionals, it helps to reinforce their value to the total special education team. Involving them actively in their own evaluation is important to their self esteem and ownership of their responsibilities. The front page of the summary document assumes they have professional growth goals. This review frequently provides an opportunity to encourage professional growth and to identify areas where further in-service is desired.

Impact on Students
In several ways the instrument contributes to a better education for students. First, the guaranteed opportunity soon after a new position is started to discuss how things are going provides the opportunity to address misunderstandings and to clarify roles soon after a position is begun. The items on the various questionnaires are designed to identify potentially problematic areas which, if subsequently addressed appropriately, will clearly improve services to students. Lastly, satisfaction with the process has created a stronger “buy in” by all participants in the evaluation process. Evaluation needs to be relevant and meaningful in order to be constructive. Topics for further in-service have been targeted from these discussions as well as paraprofessional interest in other career opportunities explored.

What Makes it Work?
The satisfaction of everyone who uses the evaluation instrument has contributed greatly to its success. The content that the instrument provides for the review conference leads to meaningful and true dialogue regarding important issues to paraprofessionals.

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Do you have an idea for an upcoming ParaLink?

Tell us about it!

Fax: (612) 624-9344
uterm001@tc.umn.edu
Pockets of Excellence

Paraprofessional Pockets of Excellence Application Form

Please include the following information—

Part 1
- School name and address
- Contact person, title, phone number, fax, and email
- Summer contact person, phone number
- Number of paraprofessionals in your school
- Number of students working with paraprofessionals
- Age range of students

Part 2
What category or categories you are applying for? —
- Employment practices/strategies/tools for hiring, training, advancing and retaining paraprofessionals. Please specify — Recruiting, Ongoing Training, Interviewing, Recognition, Hiring, Advancement, Evaluation
- Collaborative practices/strategies/tools that facilitate collaborative relationships between paraprofessionals and teachers.
- Role practices/strategies/tools that enhance, diversify, or recognize paraprofessional roles (e.g. providing opportunities for non instructional roles, committee assignments, etc.)

Part 3
Please answer the following eight questions —
1. Why did you develop this practice/strategy/tool?
2. How did you develop this practice/strategy/tool? Please provide step-by-step information that would be useful in replication of this practice/strategy/tool.
3. What is the setting which the practice/strategies/tools are used? (e.g. work site, classroom, etc.)
4. Who uses this practice/strategy/tool?
5. What is the role of paraprofessionals in the practice/strategy/tool?
6. How does the use of the practice/strategy/tool enhance the role of paraprofessionals?
7. How does this practice/strategy/tool impact the quality of education students are being provided?
8. What really makes this practice/strategy/tool work?

Applications are being accepted until June 1, 1999
Mail or fax this information to —
Jennifer Utermarck
Institute on Community Integration
University of Minnesota
110 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
Fax (612) 624-9344

Applications are
ParaLink • 12
Para of the Year

Nomination Information

Do you know a paraprofessional who works harder and is more persistent than the Energizer Bunny? How about a paraprofessional who has more loyalty and commitment than Kirby Pucket? Or more determination than Wyle E. Coyote? Now is your chance to nominate this outstanding person for Para of the Year! Please include the following information—

Part 1
1. Name of Para
2. Where employed
3. Work address/phone
4. Number of years employed as a para
5. Number, type, and age of students/clients served
6. Name of Nominator
7. Nominator’s address/phone

Part 2
1. Write a short paragraph telling how this paraprofessional exhibits exemplary work skills including qualities such as —
   • Communicates effectively
   • Listens attentively
   • Takes initiative
   • Understands his or her role in the school community/work setting

2. Describe the unique qualities or characteristics that set this para apart from his or her peers.
   • What contributions does this paraprofessional make to the school/work environment during the work day and beyond?
   • How does this paraprofessional make a difference in the lives of his or her students or clients?
   • What is this paraprofessional’s involvement in professional development?

3. Include statements of support from students, parents, teachers, and/or peers.

Applications are being accepted until April 5, 1999
Mail or fax this information to —
Jennifer Utermarck
Institute on Community Integration
University of Minnesota
110 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
Fax (612) 624-9344

Para Week
April 19th–25th
National Conference
The 18th National Conference on the Training and Employment of Paraprofessionals in Education, Rehabilitation, and Related Services. Little Rock, Arkansas, May 6, 7, & 8, 1999. Policymakers and administrators in state and local education, and other service provider agencies, personnel developers in two and four year colleges and inservice programs, paraprofessionals and other stakeholders will gain a knowledge of new dimensions in the roles, preparation, supervision, and career mobility for the paraprofessional workforce. They will learn about —

- Statewide and local initiatives to set standards for 1) paraprofessional roles in various staffing arrangements and programs, 2) skills and knowledge required by paraprofessionals working in different levels of paraprofessional positions, and 3) training and professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals.
- Incentives for retaining a skilled paraprofessional workforce
- Standards and professional development models for preparing supervisors to work effectively with paraprofessionals and direct service providers.
- Sessions specifically designed to strengthen the on-the-job performance of paraprofessionals working in home and center based early childhood programs, inclusive classrooms, bilingual education, Title I programs, and vocational/transitional services.

Sponsored by —
- The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services Center for Advanced Study in Education
- The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York

For more information on this conference please contact Anna Lou Pickett at 212-642-2948.

Family Focus Institute
The Family Focus Institute at Pathfinder Resources, Inc. helps families, organizations, programs and providers incorporate family-centered care into systems of care that serve children with special health needs and their families. The Family Focus Institute offers several education opportunities for families. Some of the titles include: Coming Together: Parent and Professional Collaboration; Focus on Families, Finding the Intersection of Two Ideas: Conflict Management, Families as Customers.

If you would like to learn more about The Family Focus Institute please contact Carolyn Allshouse, Family Focus coordinator at 651-647-6905.

Augmented and Alternative Communication Strategies, Systems and Devices
April 15th — two repeated sessions, 8:15–11:45 a.m. and 1:00–3:30 p.m.
Cost — $15 (member district), $20 (non-member district)
Location — District #287 Service Center, Plymouth, MN.

This workshop is specifically designed for paraprofessionals working with students who need to build alternative or augmentative communication skills. It is a practical and specific to individual needs workshop.

Participants will be asked to specify communication software and augmented communication devices which they are currently working with and should like training in the preregistration process.

For more information contact Linda Rees, Assistive Technology Program Facilitator, Intermediate District #287, (612) 550-7185.
Paraphernalia

School to What? New!
This newsletter focuses on information on including all learners in school-to-work. It includes valuable information in resources and upcoming events related to school-to-work. Published by the All Means All School-to-Work project of the Institute on Community Integration (UAP), College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota, and the Interagency Office on Transition Services, Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning.
This is a free publication. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please contact Pam Stenhjem at 612-615-3863 or huntx010@tc.umn.edu.

Frontline Initiative
Frontline Initiative quarterly newsletter features Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and their world. Written by DSPs, self-advocates and many leading professionals in the field, its articles present current information on DSP work and inspirational stories about providing supports. Past issues have included topics such as professionalism, education and training, stress and burnout, change in the workplace, and direct support services around the world. Frontline Initiative is published by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals.
Subscriptions for Frontline Initiative are $10 per year. For more information, call 612-624-4512.

A New Speaker Network on Paraprofessionals!
We are establishing a Speaker Network on topics related to paraprofessionals. Speakers involved with our Network will have their names and topics published in a resource guide and listed on the Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium’s Web Site. Speakers will receive regular updates on new information and resources available related to paraprofessionals. They would also be invited to attend a Consortium meeting and present at the Statewide Paraprofessional conference. If you are interested in being a member of this Network, please contact Jennifer Utermarck for an application. She can be reached at (612) 626-7335 or uterm001@tc.umn.edu.

Para Week
April 19th–25th
The ParaLink is a free publication. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, contact —

Jennifer Utermarck
(612) 626-7335
uterm001@tc.umn.edu.

ParaLink Newsletter
Institute on Community Integration
University of Minnesota
110 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Dr. SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Address Correction Requested

Note
In the last issue of ParaLink, information was given on becoming a member of the Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium. We would like to clarify that letters of interest will be reviewed and recommended once a year.