

Paraeducators in SMMUSD: At a Glance

Paraeducators play a vital role in our classrooms. They work closely with teachers and specialists to support students' academic, social, and emotional success. Below are answers to common questions families have about para support in our schools. This guide is written by parents, for parents.

What Paraeducators Do: Paraeducators (or “paras”) provide academic, behavioral, safety, and personal-care support across all school settings, always under the direction of a teacher or service provider. They assist in general education classrooms, special day classes, recess, lunch, transitions, and on field trips to help students access learning and participate fully in school life.

Training: Paras receive ongoing professional development throughout the year, including multi-day training before school starts, regular behaviorist-led sessions, and Nonviolent Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) training. They also receive ongoing on-the-job coaching from the teachers and specialists they support.

Para Levels:

- **Level 1 - Instructional Support:** Academic, behavioral, and functional support across school settings.
- **Level 2 - Medical Support:** All Level 1 support plus specialized healthcare tasks, such as g-tube feeding or assistance with medical equipment.
- **Level 3 - Behavioral Support:** All Level 1 support with additional training to assist students who need intensive behavior intervention or safety-related support.

Assignments: Paraeducator support is determined by each student's IEP and classroom needs. Some students require 1:1 support for safety, behavior, or access to learning, while others benefit from shared or cohort-based support that promotes independence and social interaction.

Consistency: Paras are assigned to school sites, not individual students, which means they may rotate or shift as school needs change. This flexibility ensures that students don't become overly dependent on one adult and that staffing can be balanced across classrooms and programs.

Communication: Paras do not communicate directly with families about a student's program or progress. All communication must go through the Teacher of Record to ensure accuracy, consistency, and compliance with California Education Code.

IEP Meetings: Paraeducators are not required members of the IEP team, but their daily observations may be shared with the team through the teacher and can inform present levels, goals, and supports.

Daily Life: Paras assist students during unstructured times such as recess and lunch, during classroom transitions, on field trips, and in electives. They help promote participation, safety, inclusion, and skill development throughout the school day.

Concerns: Families should follow the standard communication process: Teacher of Record → School Psychologist → Site Administrator (Assistant Principal or Principal) → Special Education Coordinator → Assistant Director of Special Education → Director of Special Education.

Professional Boundaries: Families cannot hire their child's para privately for outside work, and parents / guardians cannot be hired to serve as their own child's paraeducator within the district.

After-School Events: Requests for para support at after-school activities must go through the school's site administrator. Support may be provided, after review of the IEP documents, if the student is actively participating (e.g., performing in a concert), not just attending as a spectator. Requests for para support at after-school activities must go through the school's site administrator. Support may also be provided at events if deemed appropriate by the school team.

Appreciation: Notes, drawings, or small gestures of thanks are meaningful ways to recognize paraeducators and show appreciation for their work with students.

