

**GUIDELINES FOR STAFF REGARDING
IN-CLASS DELIVERY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORT
IN THE NOVI COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**

(Revised 12/04)

I. RATIONALE

State and federal law requires that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities be educated alongside their non-disabled peers, and that removal from the regular class occur only when learning cannot be satisfactorily achieved, **even with the use of supplementary aids and materials**. The underlying assumption is that all students belong in and belong to general education. The IEP spells out the exceptions: the extent to which the student will not participate in the general curriculum, the extent to which the student will not be educated alongside non-disabled peers, and the extent to which the student will not have opportunities to participate in nonacademic and co-curricular activities. Absent any other direction in the IEP, it is assumed that the student will participate fully in the general education setting, with the same opportunities as all other students.

In-class support from a special education teacher or paraprofessional is one way of keeping special students in classrooms with typically-developing peers. General education teachers typically have a great deal of expertise in specific content areas and general learning theory. On the other hand, special educators may be more skilled in the area of the teaching/learning process as it relates to specific individuals. By teaming these two experts in content and process, maximum benefit to the students should be the outcome.

In addition to improving mastery of content, student self-esteem is enhanced when we reduce opportunities for labeling, excluding, and stigmatizing students.

The decision to place a special student in a regular class with support is made by the IEPT. Paraprofessionals and resource teachers are not placed in general ed classes as an effort to provide relief for classroom teachers with “too many” special students. Nor do particular general education classes “automatically” get a support person. In-class support is a child-centered decision made by a committee of concerned people. The decision is based on the types of individualized instruction and supplemental aids and services that are required according to the student’s IEP.

Once in-class support by a resource teacher or paraprofessional is prescribed in an IEP, it is not optional for the district to provide it. Failure to provide a program or service mandated by an IEP puts the district at risk of being cited for noncompliance.

II. MODIFICATIONS VERSUS ACCOMMODATIONS

The terms “modification” and “accommodation” have very specific meanings which must be defined so that there is common understanding about the in-class support that a student will receive.

An accommodation is an adaptation or change that does NOT fundamentally alter or lower the standards of a course/lesson/test/etc.

A modification is an adaptation or change that DOES fundamentally alter or lower the standards of a course/lesson/test/etc.

Both accommodations and modifications are intended to provide students with disabilities with an equal opportunity to participate in the general curriculum, and to be educated with non-disabled peers. The an accommodation or modification does not guarantee a passing grade; the goal is to open the door to learning.....to “bypass” the disability.

The decision to provide either accommodations or modifications is a responsibility that rests with the IEP Team. Because modifications significantly alter/lower the standards that all other students follow, parents must have advance notice (through the IEP) of those modifications, as well as the opportunity to discuss/disagree. Accommodations, while they do not alter/lower the standards, should also be shared with parents in advance so that they are informed of the specific demands that are (or are not) being placed on the student.

III. LEVELS OF SERVICE

Special education programs/services exist along a continuum from most to least restrictive. Creative programming yields hybrids of the various levels described here.

A. The student may be placed in a **special education classroom** for a particular class. In Novi these classrooms are run under the state rule for resource programs.

B. The student may be placed in a regular education class in which a **general education and resource teacher co-teach**. In a true co-teaching situation, all classroom responsibilities are shared, including planning and preparation, instruction, and grading. The teachers may share responsibilities by alternating roles, presenting lessons jointly, rotating units, dividing classroom tasks, etc. Course content, objectives, materials, assignments and instructional processes may be modified, or accommodations made be provided, in order to meet the needs of all the students in the class.

If the general education teacher is giving the grade for the course/subject, the class counts as ‘general education time’ on the IEP. If the resource teacher is giving the grade for the course/subject, the class counts as ‘special education time’ on the IEP. However, because of state rules around teacher certification, the teacher who marks the report card must always have an endorsement in the content area that is being graded.

If the class is being graded by the general education teacher, but the resource teacher is spending time in the regular classroom working on IEP goals, only the time specifically spent working on IEP goals would count as ‘special education time’ on the IEP.

C. The student may be placed in a **general education class with in-class support from a paraprofessional**. The paraprofessional works as an aide to the general education teacher so that the needs of all students may be better addressed. Course objectives may or may not be modified in this situation. Accommodations may also be provided in accordance with the student’s IEP. The paraprofessional’s presence may allow the opportunity for more individual attention or reinforcement, but the general education teacher is still the person who is ultimately responsible for teaching and grading the student (even if the student is working on a significantly modified curriculum.) A paraprofessional may support/reinforce instruction provided by a general or special education teacher, but a paraprofessional should not be the primary deliverer of instruction.

With only paraprofessional support, the class would count as ‘general education time’ on the IEP. Oftentimes, in grades 5-12, students placed in classes with paraprofessional support are also on the teacher consultant’s caseload for purposes of monitoring progress toward IEP goals. In grades K-4, students placed in classes with paraprofessional support may be on the resource teacher’s caseload for purposes of monitoring progress toward IEP goals.

D. The student may be placed in a **general education classroom with Ed Resource drop-in support** available (most common at the high school level.) These students should generally be capable of handling general education instruction. Ed Resource “drop in” time is often listed as a supplementary aid/service on the IEP and therefore does not enter into the calculation of general education hours versus special education hours on the IEP.

E. The student may be placed in **regular education with Teacher Consultant (TC) support** only. The TC meets briefly with the student usually once or twice a week to check on progress and perhaps remediate specific skills (as determined by the IEPT).

F. The student may be placed in **general education with no support**. This situation occurs when the student has not been identified as having a disability in a particular content area. When the student is not disabled in any area, or when the IEPT determines that the student is able to compensate adequately for a disability, he/she is exited from special education.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE EXPECTATIONS FOR COTEACHERS

(NOTE: Variations in the following expectations may be possible if there is consensus among the teachers and administrators.)

A. Since both teachers have a responsibility to the class, both teachers are expected to be present and actively engaged for the entire scheduled time.

B. Delivering instruction is a shared responsibility. The general education and resource teacher should jointly identify essential instructional objectives (or learner outcomes) for all students based on the state's grade level content expectations and the district curriculum.

C. It is the responsibility of both teachers to assure that learning activities/materials are appropriate for the needs of the students in the class. The resource teacher is primarily responsible for adapting the methods/materials so that students with disabilities have the opportunity to master the essential objectives. To the greatest degree possible, adapted materials should parallel regular materials, and their point values (for grading purposes) should be equivalent to the regular assignment so that only one point system is needed to average grades.

D. Determining final grades for all students should be a shared responsibility. However, because of state rules around teacher certification, the teacher who marks the report card must always have an endorsement in the content area that is being graded.

E. Classroom management is a shared responsibility. Common expectations for student behavior should be jointly developed and enforced. Teachers should not challenge, question, or interfere with each other in front of students. Rather, they should present a united, "team" approach in daily classroom management.

F. Student instruction is a shared responsibility; however, the resource teacher is primarily responsible for assuring that IEP goals are adequately addressed within a co-teaching setting.

G. Communication with parents is a shared responsibility. The general education teacher is primarily responsible for reporting on the progress of general education students. The resource teacher is primarily responsible for reporting on the progress of special education students. Written communications (i.e., class letters re: projects or field trips) should be written so as to reflect a team approach (i.e., use of the term "we", joint signatures, etc.).

H. The coteachers are expected to communicate with each other regularly, if briefly. A planned agenda would be helpful and time might be provided to address such questions as:

1. What is the most satisfying aspect/event that's occurred recently in coteaching?

2. What is the least satisfying aspect/event that's occurred recently in coteaching?
3. Are there any changes we need to make in our classroom procedures?
4. What are the upcoming units, essential objectives, and potential modifications or accommodations?

While the administrative expectation is that both teachers are jointly and equally responsible for the learning of all students, it is recognized that general education and resource teachers bring different skills and assumptions to the collaborative situation. In order to prevent misunderstandings, it is important that both partners be open about their assumptions coming into the collaborative situation, and that they be direct about what they would/would not like their partner to do in the classroom.

The following sections suggest ways that the unique strengths and assumptions of each discipline can be channeled in order to enhance instruction for all students.

IV. ROLE OF THE RESOURCE TEACHER

Collaborative service delivery requires that team members assume a variety of roles in the classroom. However, a certified staff member should not spend all of his/her time carrying out responsibilities that do not require a specialized degree (that is, paraprofessional-type responsibilities.) The resource teacher might appropriately perform the following duties:

- A. Assist the general education teacher in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of individual students, including IEP goals/ objectives of the students in the class
- B. Co-plan with the general education teacher to assure that objectives, materials and instructional processes are appropriate for all students
- C. Develop alternative forms of assignments and tests
- D. Provide resources for alternative textbooks or reading material, perhaps ordering materials through the special education budget
- E. Share instructional responsibilities, especially in order to demonstrate an alternate method of presenting material
- F. Develop and implement classroom and individual behavior management strategies in cooperation with the general education teacher
- G. Share responsibility for correcting papers and determining final grades

H. Communicate with other resource teachers and ancillary staff about progress of individual students toward IEP goals (usually in the situation of a departmentalized program where resource teachers share students)

I. Facilitate inclusion of all students in general classroom activities

V. ROLE OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER

General education teachers are experts in the content areas in which they've been trained, and are often accustomed to being autonomous in the classroom. The introduction of another adult into the classroom requires rethinking of practices and procedures that may have become second nature. General education teachers can contribute to the effectiveness of in-class support situations by keeping the following items in mind when working with an instructional partner such as a resource teacher or paraprofessional.

A. Use language/behavior with students and parents that promotes the perception of you and your partner as a team in the classroom.

B. Remember to involve your instructional partner in planning. Advance knowledge of desired student outcomes, upcoming assignments, and scheduled quizzes and tests is essential for a resource teacher to be able to develop alternative materials.

C. Provide your partner with a copy of the teacher's manual (if available), answer key, or textbook, as well as any notes, outlines, or worksheets that would help your partner stay a few jumps ahead of the students.

D. Ask for frequent feedback about how your partner sees the needs of special learners being met.

VI. ROLE OF THE PARAPROFESSIONAL

The goal of placing a paraprofessional in any classroom - general or special education - is to maximize the amount of individual attention students receive. Therefore the paraprofessional should not be viewed as a personal secretary to the teacher, but rather as an extension of the teacher - that extra set of eyes, ears, and hands which will allow additional individual attention for all students. Duties of the paraprofessional may include (but are not limited to):

A. Taking attendance

B. Repeating directions to individuals or small groups

C. Reinforcing instruction originally provided by the teacher with individuals or small groups

- D. Taking notes during a lecture for later use by students
- E. Monitoring guided practice or independent work
- F. Monitoring cooperative learning activities
- G. Supervising independent work by high achievers while the teacher works with the lower group
- H. Running small study groups prior to a test (perhaps while more advanced students work on a higher-level project)
- I. Supervising a small group library assignment while the teacher works with other students in the classroom
- J. Assisting students during lab activities or project time
- K. Administering (but not developing) alternate test formats (i.e., reading a test aloud to a small group)
- L. Proctoring make up tests
- M. Providing proximal controls for disruptive students
- N. Facilitating social interactions of students with language/social delays
- O. Taking data on behaviorally disruptive students
- P. Modeling problem solving skills with the teacher (i.e., role playing the process in front of students)
- Q. Communicating with the special education caseload teacher about students who are having difficulty
- R. Implementing strategies in the general education classroom which have been developed by the special education teacher or ancillary staff members
- S. Assisting students with personal care/activities of daily living
- T. Setting up and operating assistive technology or other specialized equipment in the classroom

Paraprofessionals should not be expected to plan instructionally for students. They work at the direction and under the guidance of the general or special education classroom teacher. While paraprofessionals may provide input to the teacher for formative evaluation purposes, the responsibility for summative evaluation of students remains with the teacher.

VI. AVOIDING PITFALLS AND RESOLVING PROBLEMS

Communication is a key factor when two adults work together in one classroom. Expectations and assumptions should be stated clearly and frequently. If one partner needs something from the other, that need should be communicated directly.

When a problem arises around the way the program is working, the first step should be for the two adults involved in the class to sit down and brainstorm solutions. A team approach is important. If the difficulty is between the general education teacher and the paraprofessional, it may be helpful to involve the student's special education caseload teacher in problem solving.

At times it may be appropriate for the special education staff member to bring the situation to a special education department meeting. This should be for the purpose of gathering ideas and collaborating on solutions. The general education teacher may also be invited to the department meeting for some group problem solving.

If the two team members cannot resolve the problem, a building administrator should be consulted. The administrator will assist the team in resolving the problem, and may involve the special education director in the process.

If necessary, it may be possible to arrange for the general and special education teachers to be released from class (with guest teachers) to engage in joint planning. Such requests should be directed to the building administrator and/or director of special education.