

Research shows paraeducators need more training in speech language services

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According to Sarah Douglas, an assistant professor of special education, paraeducators do not typically receive training that helps them support children with cognitive, motor or communications needs. Research by Douglas shows that paraeducators—school employees who work under the supervision of teachers—can better support students with complex communication needs, and that paraeducators who received training are more effective in their classrooms.

According to the article, nearly half of all children in early childhood special education programs experience difficulty with communication and qualify for speech language services. A percentage of these children require augmentative and alternative communication, which can include the use of [sign language](#), picture symbols, speech-generating devices and [gestures](#) to augment speech.

"Paraeducators are concerned," said Douglas, "because they end up spending the bulk of the time with students with special needs, and they want to be effective."

Douglas said that initial evidence suggests that two-hour, one-on-one, best-practices training positively affected interactions between paraeducators and students with communication needs. The training also increased the number of communication opportunities that the paraeducators made, and students took more turns during exercises.

The training, which can now be delivered in person or online, is effective, said Douglas. Paraeducators reported that the training received was beneficial. Moreover, supervising teachers reported improvements in the communication support provided by those paraeducators.

This innovative study is already being adapted into College of Education courses where students are being exposed to this research.

"This information is being infused into pre-service [teacher training](#) in the college's required special education courses," said Douglas. "All students studying special education will receive training on this topic."

Douglas worked with Janice Light, a distinguished professor in the College of Health and Human Development, and David McNaughton, a professor of [special education](#), on this research and article.

Douglas said that her research was based on research that Light conducted, which focused on early intervention services with parents of children with communication needs. Douglas said that she took that content and adapted it for use in schools.

Douglas hopes that the training will help provide communication partners, such as paraeducators, with strategies that can increase the quality of education that students with communication needs receive.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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