

## What's Next?

The researchers of this study suggest the following next steps:



1. Schools should look at the way paraprofessional services are delivered. Are they working for each student?
2. Students with disabilities should help decide how much support they get.
3. Schools should look for ways to create shared learning experiences that can encourage new friendships between students with and without disabilities.
4. School leaders should start a conversation about how to improve school inclusion. Schools need to make sure they are teaching students with disabilities, and not "hosting" them.
5. We need to listen to students with disabilities. Their experiences and perspectives will help improve schools for all students.

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### Source:

Broer, S. M., Doyle, M. B., & Giangreco, M. F. (2005). Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional supports. *Exceptional Children*, 71, 415-430.

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# CDCI Research into Practice



## Name of Study:

**Perspectives of Students with Intellectual Disabilities about their Experiences with Paraprofessional Supports**

## What was this Study About?

Sixteen young adults with intellectual disabilities who had help from a paraprofessional when they were in school were asked questions about their experiences with this help. Paraprofessionals are sometimes called teacher assistants or paraeducators. They provide help to students and teachers in general education classes.

The 16 young adults answered questions about:

- (a) themselves (How old are you? Where did you go to school?),
- (b) what it was like in school working with a paraprofessional,
- (c) their point of view about those supports, and
- (d) what advice they would give to people in schools.

This study is important because it asked students with intellectual disabilities about their thoughts and ideas about paraprofessional help in school.

***A look at what we have learned***



## What was learned from this Study?

The young adults who were interviewed provided important information about the ways paraprofessionals worked with them. They described paraprofessionals taking four different roles: as **mothers**, **friends**, **protectors from bullying**, and **teachers**. Some spoke about these relationships positively and others spoke about them negatively. Researchers found that there was cause for concern in each of the four roles.

### Paraprofessional as Mothers:

Participants had mixed feelings about a paraprofessional acting as mothers. Some said it was a caring relationship, but others said it was unwanted attention. Individuals in the study explained how too much mothering could get in the way of building relationships with other classmates.

**Cause for Concern:** Paraprofessionals acting like mothers can get in the way of relationships between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

### Paraprofessional as Protector from Bullying:

Participants said they were bullied at school. Paraprofessionals acted as a shield against bullying when they were there and could stick up for students if they heard about bullying after it happened.

**Cause for Concern:** Even if paraprofessionals could stop bullying when they were around, they could not stop all the bullying. The root of the problem is that bullying still happens. Having paraprofessionals does not teach students to deal with bullies.

### Paraprofessional as Friend:

Many of the participants talked about feeling like they were different or did not fit in at school. Since the participants did not have a lot of friends, many thought of paraprofessionals as their friends at school.

**Cause for Concern:** Having a friend is important for any person, but the researchers were concerned because paraprofessionals are not actually friends, but are employees hired to help the students. It is important for students to have friends their same age.

### Paraprofessional as Primary Teacher:

Participants reported that they felt like the main classroom teacher was too busy to work with them, so they mostly learned from the paraprofessional. Sometimes this help was welcomed, but other times it was unneeded and unwanted.

**Cause for Concern:** If a student feels like he or she is being taught by someone else other than the teacher, it increases the student's feeling that he or she is "different." It also made the researchers wonder if the students were getting the same opportunities to learn as students without disabilities.

