



Teachers' Corner

Everything YOU Need and Want to Know but Were Afraid to Ask



Iris Kerbis Cantor
Retired Special Education Teacher

Dagny Fidler, Ph.D.
Morningside College

Catherine Brown, M.Ed., BCBA
*Director of Behavior Services,
Beacon Day School*



Not pictured:

Mark C. Francis, Ph.D.
Francis-Young International-Consultants

Karren Streagle, Ph.D.
Idaho State Department of Education

Paula Bodzioch
Marklund Day School, Bloomington, IL

Jennifer Naddeo, Ph.D.
Director of Special Education, Schaumburg SD #54

This session was one of three such sessions at the 18th annual DADD conference designed for teachers to address questions and issues in the field. It was an open forum for teachers to discuss the many challenges and demands facing them in today's educational climate. This was an administrative panel that looked at issues participants brought to the discussion. The focus was on discussion guided by the participants around key challenges and possible solutions that the participants brought to the session, and it was provided in a safe and confidential environment. Following is a summary of the session.

Working with Para-educators

Discussion centered on several issues in this area. Teachers in self-contained settings and in general education often work

with para-educators. This can lead to teachers feeling more like managers than educators. Difficulties can arise when para-educators work with several different teachers as students move from classroom to classroom, so communication is key, and clear expectations are needed. Usually, this means standard expectations should be created for the role and responsibilities of para-educators in the school. One suggestion was to develop a team approach by ensuring that teachers are willing to do all of the tasks they give to the para-educators. Building a relationship of trust and open communication improves the quality of the working environment and services for students. It is also important that each teacher is clear regarding each day's expectations, since lessons and activities will vary. As students are told what will be happening, teachers can explain what they want para-educators to do to help support student learning.

Participants also discussed the importance of having administrators understand the complexities of supervising para-educators in order to provide support to the teachers who are working with them. Additionally, pre-service courses need to address the issues teachers may face, such as supervising people who are older and have more years of experience. These supports may make working with para-educators easier for teachers.

Resource

Gerlach, K. (2014). *Let's team up! A checklist for teachers, paraeducators & principals*. Port Chester, NY: National Professional Resources, Inc.

<https://www.amazon.com/Lets-Checklist-Teachers-Paraeducators-Principals/dp/1935609947>

Note: This book is a good resource for working on clear expectations for para-educators.

Student Behavior

Student behaviors often impact the educational process. Understanding power struggles is important to understanding and dealing with inappropriate behaviors in class. One participant shared the phrase "behaviors are messages." Students use behavior to communicate, and they need to have more effective ways to communicate what they want and how they feel. Participants shared that it is important to emphasize the need for con-

sistency when implementing behavior management strategies. Schools need to have appropriate professional development in this area to help teachers develop greater skills in dealing with more complex behaviors.

Resource

Dealing with Power Struggles

<https://positiveparenting.com/dealing-with-power-struggles/>
<https://positiveparenting.com/understanding-power-struggles/>

Dealing with Difficult Parents

This is an area where everyone agreed that relationships are key. It is important for teachers to be able to link parents with other school resources and community services. The group discussed the need for teachers to have a support system when dealing with parents and others. Additionally, administrators need to be sensitive when developing class lists, ensuring that new teachers are not given students whose parents are known to be difficult in their demands. Teachers also need to recognize that parents bring their past experiences with education with them when they deal with schools, and some of their experiences may have been very negative. Their perspectives need to be respected and addressed by showing them that things are different now.

Resource

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2012). *Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

https://www.amazon.com/Crucial-Conversations-Talking-Stakes-Second/dp/0071771328/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1542142345&sr=8-1&keywords=crucial+conversation

Other Topics

The group also mentioned a few issues that we did not discuss in depth given our time limitations. They included:

- The need to find quality teachers, programs for new teachers to observe, and experienced mentors to provide guidance;
- How to find quality, cooperating teachers for student teaching experiences;
- Training for general education teachers in working with para-educators and regarding the needs of special education students;
- Social integration; and
- How to navigate disconnects or miscommunications with administrators.

Participants at this session included professors, consultants, supervisors and other administrators, but did not include current classroom teachers. Since the purpose was to address the needs of teachers, we wanted to make our notes available to members with the hope that you, as a teacher member, would find the information helpful. We are hopeful that in the future teachers will be able to attend the conference and a session such as this to share concerns and ideas, and to help other participants find solutions for their own situations.

This session was an opportunity to examine important topics from differing perspectives, and the experience of the panel members and participants brought a richness to the discussion. The panel members hope that this will be the first of many such panel presentations at future DADD conferences. ■