



REL Appalachia Ask-A-REL Response

Educator Effectiveness, Teacher Workforce
October 2017

Question:

What is the impact of adding classified staff (for example, instructional assistants) on student outcomes in a K–12 setting, particularly in elementary schools?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about the addition of classified staff to the classroom. Ask-A-REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask-A-REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for research reports and descriptive study articles on classified staff. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed the effects of classified staff in classrooms on student outcomes. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist.

References

Brock, M. E., & Carter, E. W. (2013). A systematic review of paraprofessional-delivered educational practices to improve outcomes for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 38*(4), 211–221. Abstract retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1049723>; full text available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.954.2182&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

From the abstract: “The involvement of paraprofessionals in the education of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) has been both complex and controversial.

Many scholars and advocates have raised concerns about the roles these staff members play in schools and the degree to which there is empirical support for their direct work with students. We conducted a systematic review of the literature to address two primary questions: To what extent have paraprofessional-implemented educational practices been shown to improve outcomes for elementary and secondary students with IDD, and what professional development strategies enable paraprofessionals to implement these strategies with fidelity? These studies indicate paraprofessionals, when given adequate training, are capable of effectively implementing a number of educational practices that result in improved academic and social outcomes, specifically, teaching communication skills, reducing problem behaviors, and increasing independence for students with IDD. Follow-up training and support, modeling, and performance feedback were prominent training components across most studies in this review and are validated in the broader research literature. However, limitations leave many questions unanswered about how to best train and support paraprofessionals. We discuss recommendations for preparing paraprofessionals who work with students with IDD, as well as future directions for research.”

Clotfelter, C. T., Hemelt, S. W. & Ladd, H. F. (2016). *Teaching assistants and nonteaching staff: Do they improve student outcomes?* National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research Working Paper No. 169. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED573191>

From the abstract: “This paper examines the influence of teaching assistants and other personnel on student outcomes in elementary schools during a period of recession-induced cutbacks in teachers and teacher assistants. Using panel data from North Carolina, we exploit the state’s unique system of financing its local public schools to identify the causal effects of teaching assistants and other staff on student test scores in math and reading and other outcomes. We find remarkably strong and consistent evidence of positive contributions of teaching assistants, an understudied staffing category, with larger effects on outcomes for minority students than for white students.”

Goe, L., & Matlach, L. (2014). *Supercharging student success: Policy levers for helping paraprofessionals have a positive influence in the classroom.* Washington, DC: Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED558020>

From the introduction: “With nearly a million paraprofessionals working in elementary and secondary schools (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), ensuring they are well prepared and supported is essential to their and their students’ success. Paraprofessionals work closely with classroom teachers to support students from special populations and are typically supervised by a general or special educator. Because paraprofessionals often work with students who have a disability, are falling behind in critical skills, or are English language learners, it is important that they have the instructional and management skills needed to support these special populations. In addition, because of the widespread implementation of new college- and career-ready standards, paraprofessionals may require additional support to help students learn more rigorous content in new ways. When properly prepared

and supported, paraprofessionals can be valuable, if not essential, members of the school community and can offer multiple benefits to students, teachers, and parents. In this Policy Snapshot, the authors summarize existing research about the instructional contributions of paraprofessionals to student learning and behavioral outcomes, as well as their noninstructional contributions. They also identify important state policy considerations for preparation, supervision, professional development, and career development for paraprofessionals and for teachers working with paraprofessionals. This Policy Snapshot provides information that governors, state legislatures, state boards of education, and state education agencies may wish to consider when designing and implementing policies related to paraprofessionals. To help states make informed policy decisions, the authors also include practical examples of paraprofessional programs and policies as well as other resources.”

Additional Ask-A-REL Responses to Consult

Ask-A-REL Southeast at Florida Center for Reading Research. (2014). *What are the research results on the benefit of teacher assistants in elementary classrooms?* Retrieved from http://rel-se.fsu.edu/_ask-a-rels/10-31/Ask%20a%20REL%20Teaching%20Assistants%20in%20the%20Classroom.pdf

Ask-A-REL West at WestEd. (2015). *Paraeducator training and student outcomes*. Retrieved from https://relwest.wested.org/system/documents/pdfs/440/original/REL_West_Memo_Paraeducator_training_and_outcomes_1015.pdf?1446145423

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (“classified staff” OR “paraeducator” OR “paraprofessional” OR “teacher aide” or “instructional aide” or “assistant”) AND (impact OR outcomes OR effect)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we

searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- **Date of the publication:** Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last ten years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Search priorities of reference sources:** Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- **Methodology:** The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- **Existing knowledge base:** Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on September 11, 2017. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask-A-REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.