Education Assistants

North Vancouver School District
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Introduction

Education Assistants (EA):
Education Assistants (EAs) are a growing category of public school employees. Much of the impetus for this growth has come from the field of special education. Their work is outlined in the Special Education manual http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf

A board may employ persons other than teachers to assist teachers in carrying out their responsibilities and duties. Education Assistants shall work under the direction of a teacher or school principal who designs programs for students with special needs. EAs perform functions which may range from personal care to assisting teachers with instructional programs. Under the direction of a teacher EAs have a key role in implementing programs and may assist with the collection of data for the purpose of evaluating student progress. However, teachers are responsible for evaluating and reporting on student progress to parents.

EAs support a range of students in the classroom/school as directed by the case manager, classroom teacher and principal. Some EAs have additional training and skills in the areas of: Sign Language (Sign Language Interpreters); Autism (Autism Support Worker); Behaviour (Behaviour Support Worker); Learning (Learning Support Worker) and Work Experience (Work Experience Facilitator). These staff are assigned to schools at the beginning of each school year, based on the type and level of student need. They work in accordance with decisions made by the school principal in discussion with the School-Based Resource Team. At times this will include the EA attending to the rest of the class while the teacher works with students who require additional support.

Communication
One of the key considerations in a quality educational plan is professional communication. It is imperative that we have effective communication between the teacher/case manager, EA and parents. The main point of contact between parents and the school is the teacher/case manager.

EA Allocation & Management

School District Responsibility
It is important to realize that while the school district receives additional funding for certain types of students with special needs, this funding comes to the district, not individual students.

School Districts through their annual staffing allocation process determine the initial allocation for EA support based on each school's profile of student needs. School teams, under the direction of the principal, then determine the most appropriate allocation of EAs to support educational plans.

School Responsibility
Students' needs change over time, and this may occur within a school year or from school year to school year. As a result, an EA might be allocated on a short-term or temporary basis to assist through a period of student transition or be more permanently assigned to a particular classroom. Over time, EA support is typically reduced as student independence increases. It is good practice and therefore recommended that school administrators allocate Education Assistants to foster students' growth, interdependence and independence.

Teacher Responsibility
Education Assistants may support one or more student's educational plans in the classroom or in the school, as directed by the teacher(s) and/or the principal. Although the primary responsibility of an EA is to work with students identified through the program planning process, it is also good practice for EAs to work with all students in the classroom.

"Classroom teachers were more engaged in situations where the education assistant supported the entire class under the direction of the teacher."

Giangreco and Doyle 2007

The inter-related work of EAs and teachers is outlined in the BCTF/CUPE joint paper available at http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/InclusiveEd/RolesandResponsibilitiesTeachersTAs.pdf

Supporting Student Diversity

All staff, including Education Assistants, are expected to develop and maintain a positive rapport with students by
- treating students in a respectful, dignified, and fair manner
- promoting independence and self-advocacy through appropriate prompting, reviewing, and reinforcing
- respecting the strengths and challenges of students
- maintaining effective and collaborative relationships
- demonstrating patience and understanding
- demonstrating appropriate responses to student-initiated interactions
- promoting appropriate peer interactions
- supporting student access to the curriculum
- encouraging appropriate student behaviours
- facilitating teacher engagement with the student

Students with learning differences are best served when schools:

a) *provide appropriate supports for their existing EAs (for example, role clarification, orientation, training, supervision);*
b) *establish logical and equitable decision-making practices for the assignment and utilization of assistants; and*
c) *select individually appropriate service delivery alternatives to EA supports, for example, peer supports, increasing ownership and capacity of classroom teachers*
d) *plan time for EAs, special education and classroom teachers to co-ordinate program planning for students*

Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, and Broer, 2004

Very few students are totally dependent on adult support. When planning arrangements for our most complex students, it can help to think about their perspective as follows:

- *How does this adult support help increase independence?*
- *How would this support change peer relationships?*
- *How would an EA's presence affect student creativity?*
- *Is this promoting learned helplessness?*
- *What would this student want EA help with?*

The Golden Rule, CEC 2009

Promoting Independence
EA supports are effective when they are managed at the school level as part of an overall plan to develop student independence. The school must plan for the best match of EA resource allocation to student needs. Support planning does not mean attaching an EA directly to one student. It requires consideration of all assessment and review processes as well as grouping of students for teaching purposes. Appropriately differentiated instruction for all students is essential. Planning should be implemented with explicitly planned strategies to fade the EA support and foster student independence whenever possible.

The use of an EA is only one of the many ways to support students. The rationale for pursuing alternatives rather than merely strengthening paraprofessional supports (EAs) is grounded in the belief that students with learning differences also need and deserve access to qualified teachers as well as natural supports from peers. http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/conundrum.pdf

For questions about Education Assistants please contact your home school, visit www.sd44.ca, or refer to the Inclusive Education 44 Learning Services Handbook