



**CENTRAL RIVERS**  
AREA EDUCATION AGENCY

March/April 2024 • Volume 2, Issue 4

[www.centralriversaea.org](http://www.centralriversaea.org)

*A Post for Paraeducators Working with Students within Schools in Central Rivers AEA*

# ParaPost



*Welcome to the next ParaPost! A Post for Paraeducators Working with Students within Schools in Central Rivers AEA. We at Central Rivers AEA are looking forward to supporting you in your role as a paraeducator and hope that you find this information useful.*

Questions? Contact - Kay Schmalen, Director of Professional Learning • (641)-329-4271 • [kschmalen@centralriversaea.org](mailto:kschmalen@centralriversaea.org)







# Making a Difference, One Student at a Time



In this issue of the *ParaPost*, we are excited to share the list of **66** paraeducators nominated by their colleagues, teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators from across Central Rivers AEA! Each nominee will receive a certificate. Winners from each region and one overall winner from Central Rivers AEA will be announced this spring. Nominees are scored against a rubric based on the paraeducator competencies. ***Congratulations to each of our nominees, and thank you to those who took the time to nominate a paraeducator!***

Paraeducator Name	School District
Sarah Abernathy	Hampton-Dumont
Sherry Anderson	CAL
Dwight Angel	Lake Mills
Lisa Anton	Union
Lisa Arens	Mason City
Lanette Beck	Mason City
Angie Bovy	Hudson
Claire Branstad	Forest City
Diana Branstad	Osage
Jill Branstad	Clear Lake
Sandy Brown	Union
Melissa Bucknell	Central Springs
Jennifer Draheim	AGWSR
Kim Drew	GMG
LuRae Eberline	AGWSR
Jen Eckhoff	Hampton-Dumont
Kimberly Frank	Clear Lake
Morgan Friedly	Waterloo
Harley Froning	Mason City
Debbie Goodale	Osage
Diane Grassley	Dike-New Hartford
Kim Grotzinger	Hampton-Dumont
Rubi Guido	West Hancock
Fran Hanisch	River Hills
Karrie Hawk	Grundy Center
Lindsey Hedrick	Aplington-Parkersburg
Dawn Hensley	Mason City
Tina Hershey	Mason City
Machela Howe	Osage
Kelly Huston	North Iowa
Aaron Ingersoll	Mason City
Denise Jacobsen	Belmond-Klemme
Taryn Kline	Hampton-Dumont

Paraeducator Name	School District
Tammy Koch	Grundy Center
Becky Koopman	Waterloo
Patti Korth	CAL
Mary Kruse	Mason City
Amber Linthicum	AGWSR
Tracy Macbeth	Marshalltown
Jennifer Martin	Mason City
Tyler Menken	Hampton-Dumont
Steph Miller	Central Springs
Robyn Moats	BCLUW
Elizabeth Morales-Cancel	Mason City
Jaden Peterson	Iowa Falls
Kathy Polk	Hubbard-Radcliffe
Hannah Porter	River Hills
Mary Reed	Grinnell-Newburg
Bob Ritter	Forest City
Breana Saltzman	AGWSR
Jagwinder Sanjotra	Cedar Falls
Nicole Santee	Mason City
Dawn Schuster	RRMR
Megan Sheimo	Mason City
Gaye Sletten	Lake Mills
Laura Stefl	Waterloo
Peggy Stonewall	GMG
Tiffany Swenson	Osage
Barbara Urban	AGWSR
Malina Vosburgh	Mason City
Amanda Warrington	Osage
Olivia Warwick	Hampton-Dumont
Karla Wheeler	Waverly-Shell Rock
Lynn Weidler	Waverly-Shell Rock
Kit Williams	Cedar Falls



# Taking Care of You (Supporting Yourself)

*“And be sure to keep your light bright and shining – you never know just how many people you may be a lighthouse for. You never know just how many people find their way home, in even the wildest storms, because you are there.” ~ Cleo Wade*

The job of a paraprofessional is not easy. No job worth doing is really easy. Whether you find your job rewarding, stressful, or a combination of both, you need to take care of yourself in order to adequately take care of others.

Let's explore ideas and strategies for improving personal emotional health while incorporating problem-solving, networking, gratitude, self-care and habits of practice!

## **Improving Personal Emotional Health:**

- **Mindfulness Practices:** Engage in mindfulness meditation, deep breathing exercises, or progressive muscle relaxation to reduce stress and promote emotional well-being.
- **Therapeutic Activities:** Participate in activities such as art therapy, music therapy, or nature walks to express emotions and enhance self-awareness.
- **Emotional Expression:** Find healthy outlets for expressing emotions, whether through journaling, talking with a trusted friend or therapist, or engaging in creative pursuits.
- **Cultivate Resilience:** Build resilience by reframing negative thoughts, learning from setbacks, and focusing on solutions rather than dwelling on problems.

## **Problem-Solving Strategies:**

- **Define the Problem:** Clearly define the problem or challenge you're facing, breaking it down into smaller, manageable components.
- **Brainstorm Solutions:** Generate a list of potential solutions, considering various perspectives and creative approaches.
- **Evaluate Options:** Assess the pros and cons of each potential solution, considering feasibility, effectiveness, and potential outcomes.

- **Take Action:** Implement the chosen solution, monitoring progress and making adjustments as needed along the way.

### **Networking Tactics:**

- **Attend Events and Workshops:** Attend workshops, webinars, conferences, seminars, and networking events to meet new people and expand your professional network.
- **Leverage Online Platforms:** Utilize social media platforms to connect with professionals in your field, join relevant groups, and participate in discussions.
- **Offer Value:** Look for opportunities to offer value to your network, whether by volunteering, sharing relevant articles, providing referrals, or offering assistance when needed.

### **Gratitude Practices:**

- **Gratitude Journaling:** Dedicate time each day to write down things you're grateful for, focusing on both big and small blessings in your life.
- **Express Appreciation:** Express gratitude to others through handwritten notes, verbal acknowledgments, or acts of kindness.
- **Gratitude Rituals:** Incorporate gratitude rituals into your daily routine, such as expressing gratitude before meals or reflecting on blessings before bedtime.
- **Count Your Blessings:** Take a moment each day to mentally count your blessings, cultivating a mindset of abundance and appreciation.

### **Self-Care Strategies:**

- **Prioritize Self-Care Activities:** Make time for activities that nurture your physical, mental, and emotional well-being, such as exercise, hobbies, and relaxation techniques.
- **Set Boundaries:** Establish clear boundaries to protect your time and energy, saying no to commitments that drain you and prioritizing activities that bring you joy.
- **Practice Self-Compassion:** Treat yourself with kindness and understanding, embracing imperfection and learning to forgive yourself for mistakes.
- **Seek Support:** Reach out for support from friends, family, or mental health professionals when needed, recognizing that it's okay to ask for help.

### **Habits of Practice:**

- **Consistency:** Cultivate habits of consistency by committing to regular self-care practices, problem-solving routines, and networking efforts.
- **Reflection:** Set aside time for reflection and self-assessment, evaluating your progress, identifying areas for improvement, and celebrating successes.
- **Adaptability:** Remain open to change and adaptation, adjusting your strategies and habits as needed to accommodate shifting circumstances and goals.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Embrace a mindset of lifelong learning, seeking out opportunities for personal and professional growth through continuous education and skill development.

By integrating these ideas and strategies into your daily life, you can foster personal emotional health, enhance problem-solving abilities, expand your professional network, cultivate gratitude, prioritize self-care, and develop habits that support your overall well-being and success.

### **Online Resources for Wellness:**

- Shawn Achor is a happiness researcher who shares his thoughts about having a positive mindset in many TED talks. [www.youtube.com/@sachor](https://www.youtube.com/@sachor)
- Mindful Schools is a website created to support the use of mindfulness & well-being. [www.mindfulschools.org](http://www.mindfulschools.org)
- The National Resource Center for Paraeducators is a national community of paraprofessionals. [www.nrcpara.org](http://www.nrcpara.org)

# Para Help Line

Submit any questions you have and we will share the answers, advice and guidance. Please submit your questions to [tkesler@centralriversaea.org](mailto:tkesler@centralriversaea.org) and our team will address them.

## Challenging Behaviors - Impacting Other Students

This student's challenging behavior makes other kids not want to be around them. What do I do about that?

First, you have to assume that the student is worthy of friendships and relationships. Help support the student in a way that will both minimize the behavior and help others understand the behavior. One student, Kenny, used to rock back and forth when he felt anxious, and this behavior looked strange to Kenny's peers. Simply explaining to the other students what the behavior meant allowed one bright student to ask Kenny, "What can I do to help you stop rocking?" Kenny typed out a response: "Let me put my hand on your shoulder." From that moment on, Kenny's peers helped him to manage his rocking behavior by asking, "Do you want to learn from me?"

## Challenging Behaviors - Impacting Me

I am not sure what to do. I come to school everyday and work with my student who calls me names, screams in my face and sometimes becomes violent. I think I might want to quit as I cannot keep coming back everyday when I am constantly treated like this. I want to help the student, but I feel helpless. What should I do?

First of all, thank you for coming back everyday. This child needs you and needs your consistency. You are correct, you should not have to endure this day after day. I would encourage you to reach out to the special education teacher and ask some questions about the students behavior intervention plan. It sounds like it could be a couple of things. Here are some questions to guide your next steps.

1. Do you know and understand the function of the student's behavior? If not, check with your special education teacher.
2. Do you know the plan as currently written, and if so, are you using all the strategies in the plan? This includes the prevention and response strategies to both reinforce the positive behavior and reduce the challenging behavior.
  - a. If yes, then talk with the teacher about new strategies and try them for a couple of weeks to determine if they will work. With this, make sure you are collecting any data you need to determine if this plan is working. Also, verify that the plan is aligned with the function.
  - b. If not, you have to implement the strategies consistently everyday for at least two weeks to see if they still work. With this, make sure you are collecting any data you need to determine if this plan is working.

continued on next page



3. Check in often with your special education teacher and make sure you are processing these events with someone and that you are taking care of you. This is important when you are working with students who have challenging behaviors.

This job can be very difficult, but with the right support in place, great progress can be made. Don't give up!

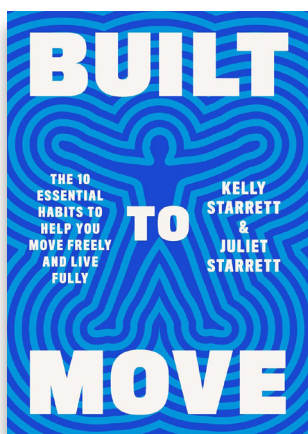
## Understanding the content of the class

I am really struggling to understand the content of the class. What should I do?

First, work with the classroom teacher to better understand the content. Try to stay ahead of the students by knowing what is being taught and assigned. You do not need to be an expert in the content, but having some foundational knowledge and strategies will help. Your role is to provide support in helping the student access the content, not teach it.

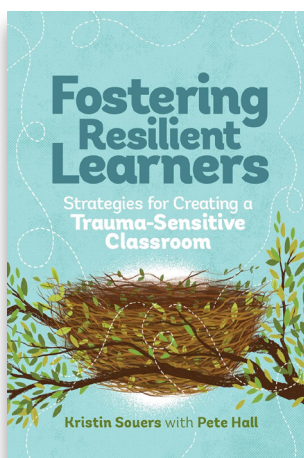
From *The Paraprofessional's Handbook for Effective Support in Inclusive Classrooms*, Second Edition by Julie Causton and Kate MacLeod. Copyright © 2021 by Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

# Recommended Reading



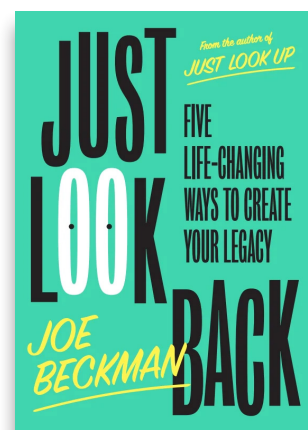
***Built to Move: The Ten Essential Habits to Help You Move Freely and Live Fully***

by Kelly Starrett and Juliet Starrett



***Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom***

by Kristin Souers and Pete Hall



***Just Look Back***

by Joe Beckman



# Technology Tip for Paraeducators:

## Snooze Your Way to Productivity: A Gmail Tip for Paraeducators

Juggling multiple tasks as a paraeducator can feel like an email avalanche sometimes, but fear not, Gmail's snooze feature is here to help you prioritize and manage your inbox like a pro!

### What is Snooze?

Snooze lets you temporarily hide emails from your inbox until a later time you choose. This helps you focus on important emails right away and avoid getting overwhelmed.

### Learn How to Snooze in Gmail

1. On your computer, go to Gmail.
2. Hover over to the email.
3. On the right, select "Snooze." 🕒
4. Choose a later day and time to get the email.
5. To snooze multiple messages, select the messages. At the top, click "Snooze." 🕒

### Paraeducator Power Tips:

- **Snooze emails for after school:** Use Snooze to hide non-urgent emails until you have more time to deal with them, like permission slips or meeting invites.
- **Snooze lesson plan reminders:** Snooze lesson plan reminders until you're ready to prep for the next day's class.
- **Snooze individual student emails:** If you need to respond to individual student emails but don't have time right away, snooze them until you have a dedicated time for checking in.
- **Create a Snooze routine:** Dedicate specific times in your day to check snoozed emails, like during your planning period or after school.

By using Snooze strategically, you can take control of your email and focus on what matters most – supporting your students! Remember, a clutter-free inbox leads to a calmer and more productive you.



# Supercharging Learning: How Assistive Technology Can Empower Your Students

As a paraprofessional, you witness first hand the unique needs and challenges of every student. You see them struggle with tasks, lose confidence, and yearn to be more independent in the classroom. But what if there was a tool that could bridge the gap, remove barriers, and unlock their potential? That's where assistive technology (AT) comes in.

Think of AT as a superpower for learning. It's a diverse range of tools and strategies that help students with disabilities overcome obstacles and participate more fully in classroom activities. From simple text-to-speech software to specialized communication devices, AT can be the difference between frustration and success, it helps students become more independent, and is a lifelong skill they will use!

## Common Classroom Tasks Where AT Can Shine:

- **Reading:** Text-to-speech software, audiobooks, graphic organizers, and digital highlighting can make reading texts more accessible and engaging.
- **Writing:** Speech recognition software, dictation tools, grammar checkers, and word prediction software can help students overcome writing challenges and express themselves more effectively.
- **Math:** Talking calculators, math manipulatives, and virtual manipulatives can make complex math concepts more concrete and easier to understand.
- **Organization and Time Management:** Calendar apps, timers, and to-do lists can help students stay organized and on top of their tasks.
- **Communication and Social Interaction:** Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, communication boards, and social skills apps can help students who have difficulty speaking or interacting with others.

## Identifying Opportunities for AT Intervention:

- **Observe:** Watch for students who struggle with specific tasks, take longer than others, or seem frustrated or disengaged. Keep a running list over time.
- **Talk to the Teacher and Student:** Collaborate with the teacher and the student to understand their specific needs and challenges.
- **Think About the Task:** Break down the task into smaller steps and identify specific areas where AT could provide support.
- **Share** those ideas with the special education teacher & collaborate with them to find Assistive Tech Tools that will help your student!

Remember, AT is not a magic solution, but it can be a powerful tool in your paraprofessional toolbox. By understanding its potential and actively seeking AT support, you can help your students become more confident, independent, and successful in the classroom. So, embrace the possibilities of AT, and watch your students soar!

Additional Resources: [Central Rivers AEA AT](#) • [AEA Digital Resources](#) • [LMS Learning](#)

# 20 Ways to Provide Invisible or Silent Support

1. **Highlight the directions.** On a complex or dense worksheet or lab, use a highlighter to help the student easily identify key directions.
2. **Jot it down.** If the teacher gives directions verbally, write those directions down on a note and give it to the student (e.g., “Turn to page 421”).
3. **Create a checklist.** Create a checklist of written directions for the student to follow (e.g., 1. read with a partner, 2. answer the question, 3. find another partner and compare).
4. **Provide a model.** For example, prior to an in-class task being assigned, model a similar math problem with the work shown and the correct answer on the top of the worksheet.
5. **Enlist a peer.** For example, say, “Claire, can you help Javier get his coat’s zipper started if he needs help?”
6. **Create materials in advance.** For example, have key vocabulary from the lecture listed and defined on a piece of paper or pre-cut materials so that cutting is not required by the student.
7. **Reduce the work.** For example, if you know the student can complete three problems independently, expect only three answers rather than five.
8. **Use technology.** For example, provide ongoing feedback and support without peers or others knowing by typing comments on a Google Doc or using Google Chat with the student.
9. **Use Ask 3 Before Me.** Implement a classroom policy in which all students seek help from three peers before asking you or the teacher.
10. **Float.** Rather than sit next to the student, stand and move about the room to be available for everyone’s support.
11. **Provide stop-by support.** This means that you only stop and check in on the student you support after you have checked in on at least six other students. Then, repeat the process.
12. **Use a sticky note of a bookmark.** Pre-mark pages in the text that the student needs to open.
13. **Prep for discussion.** For example, for students with complex support needs or who are building skills, write down several questions the students can ask or comments they can share during a class discussion.
14. **Provide a pointer.** Give students an object with which they can point to each word while they read independently or with the class.
15. **Transition wordlessly.** Use a timer on your phone or a stopwatch to let your student know it is time to transition to the next task or class.
16. **Engage partners.** Allow every student to have a designated walking buddy to get to the next class.
17. **Text support.** Use a student’s phone to offer support via text or notes.
18. **Bookmark it.** Set up the students’ laptops with bookmarked sites so they can easily navigate to frequently used websites (e.g., e-mail, Google Classroom, Khan Academy).
19. **Simplify.** If directions or language is complex, complicated, or provided too quickly, write it down in simplified language.
20. **Guide them.** Create a graphic organizer or other guided notes templates to help students organize key ideas from a lesson.

*Which supports can you do on your own? Which supports will you need to talk with teachers about?*





### QuickLinks

sign in

Click here to create an account

### Home

#### Search Types

- Search by Keyword
- Calendar of Sessions
- Conferences

#### User Account Information

- Professional Development Record
- My Account
- Registration History/Certificates
- Subscriptions
- Apply to Teach

#### Help & How-To

#### Contact Us

Home

Registration Cart: 0 items

## Welcome to Professional Development Online Registration

Just type what you would like to find in the search box. You may search by topic, subject area, presenter name, etc.

Search



### Upcoming Sessions

There are no upcoming sessions more sessions...

### Contact Us

Contact us if you have questions regarding upcoming sessions or questions about this website.

# New Statewide AEA Professional Learning Registration System Coming Soon!

Exciting news for Iowa educators! The professional learning system is getting an upgrade. You'll soon enjoy a more user-friendly interface, making it easier to find and navigate learning opportunities. No need to stress about your course history – we're handling the transition seamlessly. If your course ends by July 31, it stays put for now, but future courses will smoothly transition to our new system, escWorks®.

Check out the new statewide **AEA registration system document** for updates, and get ready for a smoother educational journey!



# ***Learning Opportunities!***

***Central Rivers AEA has a variety of learning opportunities for a variety of audiences.***

**#204124 CR - Paraeducator Generalist Certification Program - Course I Introduction/Foundation**

- April 18 – June 13

**#204317 CR - Paraeducator Generalist Certification Program - Course II Instructional Support**

- March 28 – June 7

**#204318 CR - Paraeducator Generalist Certification Program - Course III Behavioral Support**

- March 28 – June 7

**#204756 CR - Substitute Authorization**

- April 1 – May 5
- April 2 – May 7
- June 12 – July 9
- July 22 – August 19

**#226319 CR - Supporting Positive Behaviors in the Early Childhood Classroom**

- April 22 – June 10
- July 9 - July 23

**#215981 CR - The Happiness Advantage Book Study**

- April 16 – June 4

**#216095 CR - Collaborative Problem Solving - Essential Foundations (Level 1)**

- April 23 – June 7

**#204379 CR - Paraeducators: Enhancing Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom**

- June 6 – June 17

**#204352 CR - Literacy Development in Early Childhood**

- June 25 – July 8

***To view previous issues and/or receive our monthly email publications, visit  
[www.centralriversaea.org/educators/professional-learning/professional-learning-newsletters/](http://www.centralriversaea.org/educators/professional-learning/professional-learning-newsletters/)***

*Questions? Contact - Kay Schmalen, Director of Professional Learning • (641)-329-4271 • [kschmalen@centralriversaea.org](mailto:kschmalen@centralriversaea.org)*



Central Rivers Area Education Agency (AEA) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, gender, marital status, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic background or disability in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices as required by all applicable Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action laws, directives, and regulations of federal, state and local governing bodies and agencies. Students, parents of students, applicants for employment and employees of Central Rivers AEA shall have the right to file a formal complaint alleging non-compliance with federal and state regulations requiring nondiscrimination in educational programs and employment. Inquiries concerning application of this statement should be addressed to: Karl Kurt, Equity Coordinator, Central Rivers AEA, 1521 Technology Pkwy, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613, Telephone: 800-542-8375.