



CENTRAL RIVERS
AREA EDUCATION AGENCY

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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



Paraeducator ABC 2023-24 Award Winner!

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you. Your dedication and commitment to supporting both students and teachers are truly invaluable. Your role as paraeducators allows you to touch the lives of countless students, helping to guide them through their learning journey with patience and understanding.

Your ability to work alongside teachers to enhance the educational experience is fundamental to your school's success. You provide essential support in countless ways, from assisting in classroom management to offering individualized attention to students who need it most. The compassion and expertise you bring to your roles inspire us all.

We are incredibly grateful for your tireless efforts and the positive impact you make every day. Thank you for your unwavering support and for being such an integral part of the educational community.

Help us celebrate each of the following paraeducators who were nominated by their colleagues, the supervising teachers, administrators and families of the students they serve. There were a total of 66 paraeducators nominated from across Central Rivers AEA. Each nominee received a certificate to recognize their nomination. Entries were evaluated against the Six Paraeducator Competencies:

1. Foundations
2. Learning Environment
3. Content & Instruction
4. Emotional & Behavior
5. Professional Relationship
6. Ethical & Professional Practice

In addition to these six competencies, certification(s) earned, professional development participation, and school and community involvement were taken into consideration.

From those 66 nominees, 10 were chosen and surprised at their schools to honor them! From those 10 award winners, one was chosen to be **Central Rivers AEA Paraeducator ABC 2023-24 Award Winner!** This year's winner is **Lisa Anton** from Union High School in the Union Community School District. Read about Lisa and our other award winners!



Lisa Anton - Union High School – Union Community School District

Lisa Murphy Anton is originally from Ottumwa, Iowa. Lisa met Mark Anton after being introduced by a high school friend and they married in 2003. She graduated from Iowa State University with an English major. Her family moved to the La Porte City, Iowa area when her oldest daughter started kindergarten. Lisa has always enjoyed the small town atmosphere and the quality of life that the Union Community School systems have brought to her two daughters (senior Sydney, 18 and sophomore Emily, 16). While raising her kids, she was always drawing to education. This led her down the path of working at the elementary preschool in La Porte City. Lisa and Mark will celebrate 20 years of marriage in October. They will send their oldest daughter Sydney to Minnesota

State University in Mankato this fall who will run track. Emily is a three season athlete in volleyball, tennis, and softball who also trains in the off-seasons to better herself as a student-athlete and will keep the couple very busy. Mark is a farmer and raises cattle, he has a few special pets along with the joke of 1 million cats, but he is also a proud girl-dad! Lisa has been an associate at Union High School for the past 8 1/2 years. Lisa finds the challenge rewarding to help all kids with their classes and to help prepare them for life! Lisa is known for being the hostess with the mostess. Her impact at Union High School is felt throughout the school, not just in the classrooms of the students she works with as it is her mission to “take care of others”. To Lisa, Union isn’t just a place to work, Union is a deep commitment to the quality of character, success, and the life beyond high school that she believes every student can reach and deserves. She is a go-getter and we are so proud that she is a committed educator at Union High School.

“Lisa helps cultivate a classroom environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning and improvement.”

“Mrs. Anton believes EVERY STUDENT CAN LEARN regardless of any learning disability, learning level described, or otherwise stated in an “F” page or IEP.”

“Mrs. Anton is truly an asset to our educational community, and her positive influence extends beyond the classroom.”

“Mrs. Anton helped MANY students in the school to connect to Kate especially throughout the last year by leading the charge of making baskets, writing cards, collecting jokes, sharing stories, connecting them to Kate when she became more ill and could not be as active with her friends at UHS.”



Harley Froning - Mason City High School

“She is a proponent not just for her assigned students, but all the students in the classes she is in, as well as all of the students in the building.”

“She has a great way of communicating with the students so they do their work. Her tone of voice is calm and caring.”

“Harley is a great advocate for all of her students. She believes in their capabilities and always encourages them.”



Diane Grassley - Dike Elementary – Dike New Hartford Community School District

“She possesses a deep understanding of content and adapts seamlessly to various learning styles.”

“Diane is highly regarded as a co-teacher, going above and beyond to support not only her assigned students but also others in need, even during her personal time.”

“Diane’s dedication to student well-being and academic progress is unmatched, making her a valuable asset to the school community.”



Amber Linthicum - Ackley Elementary – AGWSR Community Schools

“Amber is one of the most positive, encouraging people I have the honor of working with.”

“Amber is committed to learning the needs of each student she works with and is open to feedback in order to do the best that she can.”

“Amber does an amazing job of making each student she interacts with feel important, unique, and special.”



Tracy Macbeth - Marshalltown High School – Marshalltown Community School District

“She goes above and beyond to ensure that her students can fully participate in class activities, even spending her own time “brailing” worksheets and assessments”

“Tracy’s kindness and respectfulness extend to all she works with, and she willingly assists whenever needed, prioritizing her students’ needs while also advocating for their inclusion and safety.”

“Tracy’s willingness to learn and collaborate, coupled with her dedication to her students’ well-being, makes Tracy an invaluable member of the school team.”



Mary Reed - Fairview Elementary – Grinnell Newburg Community School District

“Mary goes above and beyond by attending visits outside of her contract hours. She makes a point to introduce herself, take part in the visits to gain insight of student interests and to form a relationship not only with the student, but their family.”

“Mary greets students and families with a warm smile and welcome.”

“Mary is the “lead” academic coach for preschool and community partner programs. In this role, she supports the other coaches (para-educators) on Professional Development opportunities and with ethical challenges that arise.”



Bob Ritter - Forest City High School

“Mr. Ritter is “all” about kids.”

“Bob wants all students to feel welcomed and loved when in his room.”

“We have one student whose native language is Spanish. While Bob doesn’t speak Spanish, he is always ready with Google Translate to have a conversation with the student.”



Laura Stefl - Lou Henry Elementary, Waterloo

“Laura is ready and willing to use all forms of communication, such as sign language, verbal language, written language, pictures, and more.”

“Laura is a rock star when it comes to managing behaviors.”

“Laura teaches an American Sign Language class after school twice a week.”

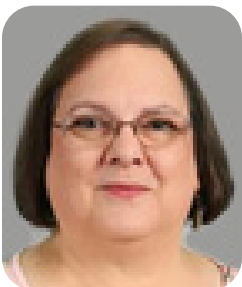


Amanda Warrington - Lincoln Elementary – Osage Community School District

“Amanda demonstrates a natural ability to recognize students’ needs, encourage their strengths and motivate them to dig deeper when tasks become challenging.”

“She regularly uses student-first, positive language, models classroom expectations, and implements classroom visuals and social stories to help all students be successful.”

“Students in our classroom thrive on familiar rules and routines which leads them to be successful during their school day.”



Karla Wheeler - Waverly Shell Rock Middle School – Waverly Shell Rock School District

“Karla is a go-getter in all instructional settings.”

“One of the most remarkable qualities of Karla is her ability to cultivate positive relationships with students.”

“Karla even offers a “babysitting” course for students.”

Congratulations!

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 and our team will address them.

My teacher wants me to work on building independence and fading support. I worry that my principal will think I am not doing my job if I am not next to the student I am supporting. How do I deal with that issue?

Make sure your principal sees and understands the fading plan you worked on with the whole team. It is important to communicate to administrators, faculty, and staff that fading support and building interdependence will be the goal for this student.

What can I be doing when not supporting my student one-on-one?

Work with the team to figure out what to do in order to help the student indirectly but still be active in your role supporting students. For example:

- **Prepare materials for upcoming lessons.**
- **Identify other students who need support.**
- **Support multiple students in the classroom, near your assigned student or when they're absent.**
- **Collaborate with your supervising teacher to work with small groups of students on specific skills or concepts.**
- **Differentiate instruction and provide targeted support.**
- **Maintain a positive and productive learning environment for the whole class.**

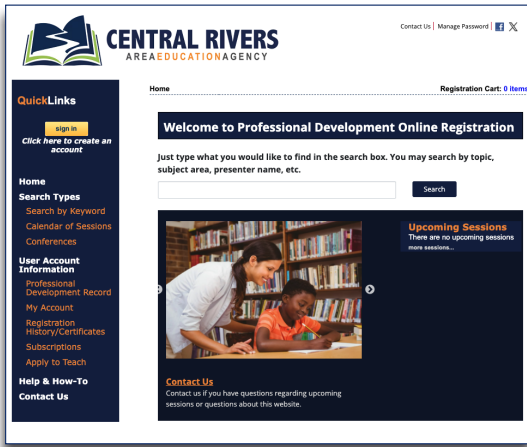
By acting with enthusiasm, patience, and respect, paraeducators set a positive tone for the classroom! All students look up to you, so your demeanor can greatly influence the overall atmosphere.

Is it selfish to be so positive?

Being positive to yourself isn't selfish – it's important. When you're positive and prioritize your well-being, you'll be more present throughout your day. This means you'll be better equipped to support your students, colleagues, and anyone else in your life who needs it.

What if I don't have the time to practice self-care?

We get it, and here's a suggestion: find little moments in your day to practice gratitude, mindfulness, or any ideas mentioned in this chapter. Think about your morning drive, while you're driving the kids to their after-school activities, or even during your shower. Feel free to get creative with how you use your time!



Coming Soon!

New Statewide AEA Professional Development Registration System is coming soon! Iowa's AEAs and AEA Learning Online are collaborating to move our professional learning courses to a new registration system.

What does this mean for me?

A new and improved interface and experience! We anticipate it will be easier to navigate and locate learning opportunities.

What about my course history & transcripts?

We are working with our current vendor to import each person's course history into the new system. You don't need to do anything at this time!

In the coming months, there will be ongoing communication about the new system. If you have any questions, contact your AEA's Professional Development office.

What does this mean for courses ending by July 31?

Tentatively, courses that end by July 31 will continue to be housed on our current registration system.

What does this mean for courses going into the new professional learning system, escWorks?

Participants will still be able to easily access our catalog/registration system from our agency website. Training and support will be provided for instructors.

Summer Recharge!

Being a paraeducator is a demanding job, so summer is the perfect time to recharge and come back feeling refreshed. Here are some tips to make the most of your break:

Disconnect & unwind:

- Set boundaries – let colleagues and parents know you won't be checking work emails or calls regularly.
- Digital detox – take a break from social media and constant news.

Reconnect with yourself & loved ones:

- Hobbies & interests – pursue activities you enjoy, whether it's reading, painting, playing music, or spending time outdoors.
- Travel & adventure – explore new places, visit family, or simply relax at home.
- Spend time with loved ones – reconnect with friends and family, or plan activities you all enjoy.

Self-care for body & mind:

- Sleep – catch up on rest and establish a healthy sleep schedule.
- Exercise – find physical activities you enjoy, like hiking, biking, or yoga.
- Healthy eating – focus on nutritious foods to nourish your body and mind.
- Relaxation techniques – try meditation, yoga, or mindfulness exercises to de-stress.

Learning & growth:

- Professional development – take workshops or courses related to your field, or explore new areas of interest in education.
- Volunteer – give back to your community and learn new skills.
- Read for pleasure – dive into a book on a topic you find fascinating.
- Remember, this is your time – don't feel pressured to fill every minute with activities. Allow yourself time to simply relax and recharge.

Some bonus tips:

- Plan something to look forward to – schedule a weekend getaway, a concert, or any event that excites you.
- Budget for some splurges – treat yourself to something you've been wanting, whether it's a massage, a new book, or a nice dinner.

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- Reflect on the past year – think about what went well at work and what you'd like to improve on when you return.

By incorporating these suggestions, you can enjoy a refreshing summer break, leaving you energized and prepared to approach the new school year with enthusiasm!

Nurturing student independence through work-based learning experiences

As a paraeducator, your role in helping students with work-based learning, like internships or job shadowing, is vital. You can make these experiences really count and shape their future outlook. How can you help them take more control? Here are some tips just for you, to support your students before and during their work experiences.

- **Foster Self-Advocacy:** Help students understand the importance of being able to speak up for themselves. Help guide them in identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and empower them to ask questions and seek clarification so that they may grow in the workplace.
- **Promote Goal Setting:** Work with students to establish purposeful and attainable goals for their work-based learning journey. Encourage your students to envision what they would like to achieve and help them devise a plan that supports these objectives.
- **Teach Problem-Solving Skills:** Equip students with the skills they will need to navigate challenges independently. Provide opportunities for them to think critically and creatively when faced with obstacles and guide them in exploring potential solutions.
- **Cultivate Independence:** Offer structured tasks that grow in complexity, letting students take charge of their responsibilities. It's a journey of growth, so begin with easy tasks and add more challenges as they show competence. Offer guidance when necessary, but urge them to take ownership step by step.
- **Lead by example:** Show initiative, confidence and self-reliance in your own work. Demonstrate how to seek opportunities, manage time and communicate professionally, encouraging students to follow suit.
- **Provide Constructive Feedback:** While recognizing students' efforts and achievements, offer specific, purposeful, and actionable feedback by delicately pointing out areas of potential improvement. Help them to set goals for growth in these areas and support them in working towards those goals.
- **Encourage Reflection:** Engage students to make connections from the experience to the impact that it can have on future decisions and opportunities. Ask them questions like, "What did you learn today?" to encourage reflection, or "What could you do differently next time?" to promote growth. Help them see their progress and celebrate their achievements.

While just one part of their journey is being prepared for the future, using these methods will greatly boost the chances of your students taking more control of their learning and growth in work-based settings. Your role and connection with your students are key in helping them gain the skills and confidence for success. With your support, they can boldly move forward into their futures. Onward!

For questions please contact: **Chuck Buseman**, Authentic Learning Coordinator at Central Rivers Area Education Agency: Work-Based Learning Specialist, Career and Academic Planning Specialist, Future Ready Consultant (cbuseman@centralriversaea.org)



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