

Paraprofessionals as Partners

~Study Groups~



The vision is to initiate multiple study groups for paraprofessionals across Connecticut in various districts and schools. It is anticipated that these study groups of paraprofessionals will meet throughout the school year with participation growing from school year to school year as additional paraprofessionals join in the learning opportunity and new groups are created.



The mission is to create learning experiences for paraprofessionals to enhance their job performance, knowledge, competency, and skills. It is also to provide opportunities for paraprofessionals to network among themselves, forming a collaborative, collegial culture within schools and districts, and ultimately within the state of Connecticut.



A study group is a facilitated group in a school building or district involving 4-8 members who gather for in-depth dialogue. The study groups will meet regularly to analyze, reflect upon, dialogue about, and construct meaning on current topics or issues. They will assist paraprofessionals to develop the skills and abilities needed to do their jobs at a highly qualified level while partnering with other educators to improve student outcomes.



The facilitator is to be a paraprofessional selected by a district or school administrator. The duties of the facilitator will include: inviting colleagues to join the learning experience; scheduling dates and times of meetings; becoming familiar with topics/issues; preparing materials; and, if appropriate, inviting outside speakers to present information. The facilitator will also facilitate during the actual study group sessions.



Facilitation during the study group meeting will include reviewing group norms, keeping the group on task, staying within the set time limits, and providing all members an opportunity to share.



Participants identified in the study groups are to be paraprofessionals who work in the same building or district as the facilitator.



Administrative support is key. This will manifest in a number of ways: regular monitoring of the group; possibly sitting in on a session; providing space and times for the groups to meet; providing release time for the facilitator to receive support and training through SERC; allowing time for the facilitator to prepare for group meetings; marketing the study groups to the staff (by either placing the study groups on the agenda of staff meetings or allowing the facilitator to speak at the staff meeting); and supporting the facilitator in securing resources for dissemination, as appropriate (e.g., copies of a timely, relevant journal article) and light refreshments.



Topics and issues will include Positive Behavior Support, LRE/Inclusion, Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals, and Specific Disabilities. Each study group will select one or more of these topics based on the needs and interests of participating paraprofessionals as well as administrative and building needs. The topics/issues for study should be a collaborative choice with input from an administrator(s), identified facilitator(s), teacher(s), and paraprofessionals (intending to be participants of the group).



SERC support will consist of facilitator training at the annual statewide conference for paraprofessionals in November 2007, as well as three sessions at SERC, Middletown in the winter and spring of 2008 (four total trainings/meetings). In addition, resource materials, SERC library membership, and consultation, as needed (via phone or email, and/or, if appropriate, on-site by SERC consultants) will be provided. In particular, SERC will provide training on skills needed by study group facilitators: group norms, meeting norms, discussion enhancers and barriers, and specifics on forming, maintaining, and assessing the impact of a study group for paraprofessionals. These training sessions for facilitators through SERC will also serve as networking opportunities for facilitators across buildings and districts.

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Study Groups for Paraprofessionals

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Paraprofessionals as Partners Initiative

Formation of Study Groups involves a number of steps:

- Identification of Facilitator(s) - District and/or school administrators are asked to nominate a paraprofessional as a potential candidate for facilitating a study group during the 2007-2008 school year*. The administrator should submit a recommendation to SERC (see application below). These candidates will receive initial facilitator training at the annual statewide conference in October. SERC will notify the selected participants and the district/school administrator.
- Initial Meeting, Lunch Bunch at the Annual Conference for Paraprofessionals, **Thursday, October 11, 2007** - The facilitators will work with SERC consultants who will provide an introduction to study groups (definition, purpose, group norms, protocols), facilitation skills, and study group curriculum (Positive Behavior Support, Instructional Support, LRE/Inclusion, Roles and Responsibilities, Specific Disabilities, such as Autism, ID, ADHD). Each facilitator will use the two months prior to the second meeting to begin logistical preparations for his or her school or district (meeting room, times, schedule for meetings, permission, etc.) and to enlist up to eight (8) participants.
- Second Meeting, One Half-Day Workshop (9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.), **January 25, 2008**, (Snow Date: February 1, 2008) SERC, Middletown - Topics will include further details on facilitation skills, study group norms, and protocols.
- Third Meeting, One Half-Day Workshop (9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.), **April 11, 2008**, SERC, Middletown - Topics will include assessment, functioning, and impact of study groups.
- Final Meeting, One Half-Day Workshop (9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.), **June 20, 2008**, SERC, Middletown - Purpose of the meeting is to celebrate and to discuss 2008-2009. Next steps, including the continuation of study groups, will also be addressed.

* The paraprofessional nominated by the school or district should:

- have an interest in and willingness to facilitate a study group;
- demonstrate ability to ask for clarification when needed;
- have served as a paraprofessional for multiple years;
- demonstrate appropriate professional conduct; and
- demonstrate an understanding and commitment to including students in the least restrictive environment.

The administrators of selected paraprofessionals must agree to the following:

- Provide release time for the paraprofessional for the above dates and times;
- Provide appropriate time for planning, organizing, and coordinating the study group;
- Provide materials, space, refreshments, and time for the meetings of the study group;
- Provide release time for the members of the study group to participate.

The paraprofessionals selected to serve as facilitators of the study groups must agree to the following:

- Attend the 12th Annual Statewide Paraprofessionals as Partners Conference on October 11, 2007;
- Participate in the Lunch Bunch at the Paraprofessionals Conference;
- Attend the meetings in January, May, and June 2008;
- Coordinate and organize meeting times, dates, and locations.

Please return application to SERC, Paraprofessionals, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457-1520. Participants will be selected on a first come, first served basis with regional consideration. Applicants will receive written confirmation regarding participation shortly after the September 28, 2007 registration closing date. The registration fee is payable upon notice of acceptance.

APPLICATION FORM: **Study Groups for Paraprofessionals**

(08-02-006-FN/Paras)dw

(Please Print Clearly.)

District/Region _____ School/Program _____ Position _____

Nominator _____ Work Phone (____) _____ Email _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ Zip Code _____

Nominee _____ Work Phone (____) _____ Email _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ Zip Code _____

Nominator Signature _____ Nominee Signature _____

In which region do you provide services? ACES // CES // CREC // EASTCONN // ED CONNECTION // LEARN