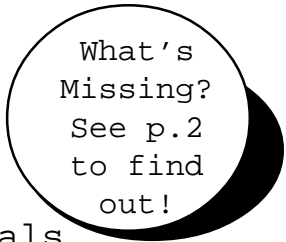


The

PARAgraph

Utah's Newsletter for School Paraprofessionals



Volume 1

Issue 1

Fall 2001

Welcome!

*Marilyn Likins, Co-Director
National Resource Center
for Paraprofessionals*



Welcome to Utah's **first** newsletter for paraprofessionals! This newsletter is the first of its kind in Utah and we hope that with state and district support we can continue to offer a first class publication created specifically for you. Regardless of whether your job title is paraprofessional, teacher's aide, speech therapy assistant, instructional assistant, intervener, classroom reduction assistant, direct care provider, or paraeducator, this newsletter is for you. These numerous job titles (and there are many more) reflect the variety of roles and responsibilities you assume as key members of an instructional team. If you have been in your profession for more than 4 or 5 years, you are well aware of how much your duties have changed. You are no longer merely responsible for creating bulletin boards, taking roll, or making duplications. Today's paraprofessionals are found in elementary or secondary classrooms providing accommodations for students with special needs, supervising on the playground or bus, serving as a job coach in the community for students with moderate to severe disabilities, conducting small group sessions in reading and math, working in early childhood programs or assisting non-English speaking students. The

list of different responsibilities that paraeducators assume is very long!

And did you know that there are over 8,000 paraprofessionals assisting teachers and other service providers in Utah? With ever-increasing student needs and rising enrollment, the classroom teacher, resource teacher or related service provider can no longer do it all; districts and agencies have turned to you to help meet the numerous and diverse needs of Utah children. In fact, when it comes to working with children, you are often the person on the "front line". As such, it is vital that you have the knowledge and skills to do your job. Be proactive. Take advantage of opportunities to improve your skillsseek them out.... ask your district for training ...be informed... and above all read. One purpose of this newsletter and our other new addition, the Utah Paraprofessional Website ([www. utahpara.org](http://www.utahpara.org)) is to keep you informed of training classes and workshops across the state. The State Paraeducator Conference is one such opportunity that I hope you've been able to take advantage of!

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IN THIS ISSUE...

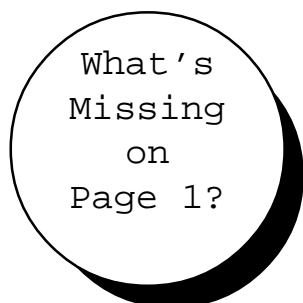
	page
How This All Came About	3
ADHD.	4
Behavior Management.	5
Want To Be On Our Mailing List?.. .	7

My hat is off to Jill Morgan who has been a driving force behind the development of this newsletter. Her insistence that Utah paraprofessionals deserved to have a publication that addressed their specific needs has never wavered.

Finally, following the events of September 11', I received an e-mail containing the following quote:

"We define ourselves by the best that is in us, not the worst that has been done to us."
--Edward Lewis.

At this time of uncertainty in our lives, I believe these words reflect the power that you have to make a difference in the lives of our children. Accept the challenge.



We chose the name 'The PARAgaph' for this newsletter and hope you like it. But what we'd also like is a logo for the newsletter. We know there are lots of creative people out there, so if you're one of them, send us your design for a logo. Something that shows who the newsletter is for and the expanded network of para-educators that we hope it's going to create.

Send your ideas to:
Jill Morgan
Editor, The PARAgaph
USU, 6800 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-6800

From the Editor



Welcome to the first issue of *The PARAgaph* - Utah's newsletter for school paraprofessionals, or paraeducators. I'm so pleased that we've been able to start this newsletter - for two reasons. First, because it establishes a network of paraeducators across the State. I'm sure that some of you feel as if you work in isolation with few opportunities for contact with other paraeducators - even the ones who work in your school, you're all so busy. So hopefully this newsletter will give you a sense of belonging and a chance to be part of what's happening for paraeducators in Utah. Second, the newsletter will be a training tool - each issue will contain valuable information that will help you do your job better. And again, for many of you, there are too few opportunities to attend training; even if you're given the opportunity it may cost time and money - which you may not have.

We plan on three issues a year - in September, January and April. This first issue is 'late' because we wanted to launch the newsletter at the paraeducator conference in November. If you couldn't make it to the conference, don't worry - we'll be featuring highlights from conference presentations in the January issue.

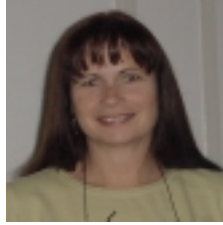
This is your newsletter, so we welcome your suggestions and ideas, and invite you to make contributions: letters to the Editor, humor, questions you may have about your role as a paraeducator that we can pass on to experts and print the answers in future issues. Or if you'd like to tell us about yourself or one of your fellow paraeducators, we'd love to feature you in an upcoming issue.

So happy to be part of this new venture!

Jill Morgan
Utah State University

The Paraprofessional Consortium or How This All Came About

Peggy Dooling-Baker
Teacher Specialist
Ogden City School District



Many individuals in different States have been working diligently since the mid 1980's to create state standards for paraprofessionals, to assess needs and to provide training for paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers. In January of 1999, a group got together in Utah and formed the State Paraprofessional Consortium. The Consortium's mission is:

...to promote training and support for paraprofessionals, leading to improved outcomes for children, youth and families.

We began by engaging in a strategic planning process, to clarify our mission and articulate objectives, with specific strategies to achieve those objectives. The objectives address: professional development for para-professionals; activities to meet the needs of supervisory personnel; communication systems to disseminate information to para-professionals; promoting visibility and public awareness of paraprofessionals; and, ways to recruit and retain skilled paraprofessionals.

The Consortium members prioritized the objectives and began to focus efforts on: *enhancing communication systems to disseminate information to paraprofessionals.* The activities of consortium members and others have resulted in two exciting communication systems for paraprofessionals. One is this publication, *The PARAgaph*, the first in Utah designed specifically for paraprofessionals. The second communication system is the creation of a web site (www.utahpara.org), which should be accessible by the time you read this, and which will include the paraprofessional standards and guidelines, training opportunities, guidance on

appropriate roles and responsibilities, information pertaining to the State Paraprofessional Conference and many more hot topics for paras.

The Paraprofessional Consortium is like the *Circle of Friends*, a sculpture of a group of individuals gathered arm in arm to celebrate life. Similarly, the Paraprofessional Consortium gathers to support and celebrate the role of the paraprofessional: a group of diverse individuals who came together with the common goal of coordinating training efforts and support for paraprofessionals. Our *Circle of the Paraprofessional Consortium* extends from Logan to South Sanpete and beyond. Members represent paraprofessionals, teachers, special education directors, State Office of Education (Students at Risk and Title I), Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind, Salt Lake Community College, Utah State University and BYU, the Department of Health, and the Utah School Employees Association.

The Paraprofessional *Circle of Friends* will continue to expand across the state as we promote efforts to communicate with paraprofessionals, coordinate training, and celebrate the role of paraprofessionals in an effort to improve outcomes for our children. We hope that you can be part of that expanding Circle, as you network with other para-educators, take advantage of opportunities for training and continue to represent your profession through the exemplary work that you do.



ADHD

Jan Pace

Paraeducator, Davis School District



ADHD is short for Attention Deficit Disorder with or without Hyperactivity. It is caused by a neurological inefficiency in the area of the brain that controls impulses, screens sensory input and focuses attention. This means that ADHD: has a biological cause; is not an excuse but is an explanation; can be hereditary but is no one's fault; and is a disability. People diagnosed with ADHD may experience such things as:

- * finding it hard to sit still
- * having a hard time taking turns, playing/working quietly
- * blurting out in class or during a conversation
- * being forgetful and/or losing things
- * being easily distracted
- * difficulty following instructions
- * talking too much
- * poor social relations

Children who have ADHD may seem uncooperative, lazy or just plain stubborn. Learning about and understanding ADHD is the first step towards helping them cope with their disability. Parents and educators are then able to use accommodations at home and in school to facilitate greater success.

It is easy to focus on the negative qualities of a child with ADHD. However, these students are typically spontaneous, creative, inquisitive, resilient, resourceful and energetic. Turning their high activity level, inquisitive minds and sensitive natures into productive and happy people while providing the structure to assure individual success is no easy task but certainly not impossible. We need to provide opportunities for:

- self-discipline - frequent discussion of rules and expectations is very important
- school success - monitor assignments, teach keyboarding, teach good study habits.
- getting organized - teach them to use a student planner
- communication - talk about feelings, check that they understand directions, be positive.

These students and adults can and will be successful in life if we will channel their ADHD traits.

You can learn more from:

CLASS ACT,
Davis School District, UT (801)402-5143
CH.A.D.D. of Northern Utah
Davis County Branch (801) 296-2264

Utah Attention Deficit Disorder Guide
Utah State Office of Education (801) 538-7700
Utah Parent Center
2290 E. 4500 So. SLC (801) 272-1051

Information taken from handbooks compiled by Dauneen Abel, Davis School District CLASS ACT.



Be sure to get your name on the mailing list for our January issue of *The PARagraph* . . . Highlights from the Paraeducator Conference to be featured.

Check out the new state Website for paraeducators:
www.utahpara.org

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT FEATURE

When To Praise: A Lesson Taught by Tara and Anthony

*Bob Morgan, Associate Professor
Utah State University*



Tara is a second grader with intellectual disability. She enjoys writing - printing her first and last name, address, and phone number. She can spell names, and place numbers in the correct order, and writes with great precision. However, at some point during every 15-minute writing class, Tara inevitably lays her head down on her desk, sighing heavily. An astute observer will notice one eye peaking out, to see if anyone is watching. If her audience is inattentive, Tara is soon howling and screeching with all the energy that her 7-year-old body can muster.

Jessica Martinez, the paraeducator assigned to work with Tara on her writing, resisted responding to the blood-curdling noise. The special education teacher had suggested that Jessica try a particular procedure: when Tara becomes a terror, praise the other students around her who are working, but say nothing to Tara. When Tara goes back to work, praise her.

What was the function of Tara's tantrum? To know for sure, we would need to perform a functional assessment. However, it would appear that the behavior's function was not to get a game or a toy; not to avoid or escape the writing task, because Tara was an excellent writer; it was not to produce sensory feedback (although perhaps she enjoyed the noise!). Tara's behavior functioned to get attention from Jessica. It did not matter that the behavior was socially unacceptable - it worked, so she used it! So when Jessica decided to praise the other students who were working, Tara could only get Jessica's attention by getting back to work.

The next day, Jessica was confident. And sure enough, Tara worked quietly on her writing assignment. The Daily Tantrum was old news.

But wait. Today, Anthony struggled. He was writing new words, and even with Jessica's assistance, was mired in frustration. His written work was going South as his discontent raced North. Soon, Anthony had his head buried in his hands and had started to cry. But today, Jessica knew what to do. She praised nearby students who were working, but did not mention Anthony's name. He continued to cry. Jessica praised the other students again. More crying from Anthony. One more round. At this point, Anthony angrily grabbed his writing sheet, ripped it from the pad and screamed, "I'm not doing this no more!" Jessica was stunned.

Why does praise sometimes energize kids but fall flat at other times? Is it unreliable? Should we avoid using it because of such different reactions? What was different in these situations? Both students were second graders working on writing tasks and functioning at about the same level. Why such different reactions?

The answer relates to the "functions," or purposes, of behavior. We all engage in certain behaviors for a reason: we go to work to get a paycheck and improve our career; we meet with friends because they listen, or laugh with us; we avoid certain people because they're loud, critical, or self-absorbed. Educators who want to change a behavior need to identify its function and find a procedure that matches it.

Most student behavior serves one or more of four functions:

1. It allows students to get attention from adults or peers, such as social praise.
2. It allows students to get activities or tangible things, such as games or toys.
3. It allows students to avoid or escape unpleasant people, places, or tasks.
4. It allows students to get sensory feedback, like listening to music, dancing, rocking, etc.

What was the function of Tara's tantrum? To know for sure, we would need to perform a functional assessment. However, it would appear that the behavior's function was not to get a game or a toy; not to avoid or escape the writing task, because Tara was an excellent writer; it was not to produce sensory feedback (although perhaps she enjoyed the noise!). Tara's behavior functioned to get attention from Jessica. It did not matter that the behavior was socially unacceptable - it worked, so she used it! So when Jessica decided to praise the other students who were working, Tara could only get Jessica's attention by getting back to work.

What was the function of Anthony's behavior? He was *not* interested in Jessica's attention, so the "praise around" did not work. Anthony wanted to escape a high-demand task: he threw a tantrum to escape the task. So when Jessica praised students who were working, it had no effect on Anthony, except perhaps to *increase* his frustration.

In dealing with Anthony, what should Jessica do differently? She may have several options, and the one selected depends on the classroom teacher. But, first, she could encourage Anthony to raise his hand and ask for a short break. Most students know they cannot escape a task indefinitely, but they might try again after a short break. Second, she could have Anthony write the easier words and raise his hand for her assistance with the more difficult words. Third, she could play a game of "hard -easy" in which Anthony writes a hard word in order to receive a easy one. Essentially, Anthony would alternate between easy and hard tasks. Sound familiar? Don't we do much the same things?

These examples illustrate how procedures must match the functions of behavior. Praise is not an effective consequence if the student is not interested in receiving it. What works for one student does not necessarily work for another. However, this is no indictment of praise. We should not avoid using it, but we should

understand when it is best used and with whom. The same procedure may yield different results until we focus on the behavior's function.

Many people have recognized the importance of examining functions of behavior in educational situations. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) now requires that, for some students, functional assessment and behavioral intervention plans be implemented. This federal legislation underscores the importance of examining the function of behavior and using the procedures that best match it. For Jessica and other paraeducators, it is a lesson that can be put to good use many times in the classroom.

Outstanding Paraeducators

Every year since the State Paraeducator Conference began, awards have been given to 'outstanding' paraeducators, nominated by schools and districts. For every category of winner there are many excellent paraeducators nominated – and many, many others whose work is outstanding in some way. We'll be featuring this year's winners in the next issue of *The PARAgaph*, and we want to hear from you about colleagues who you think deserve to be featured in the newsletter. Meanwhile, here are some of last year's winners – who they are, what they do, some of the reasons why they were chosen.

Janice Gallup

Self-contained intellectually disabled class
Hillcrest Elementary, Alpine SD

Janice has such a kind and gentle way with children. When the need arises for discipline, she does it in a way that the child responds, and yet still loves her.

Michael Miller

Mound Fort Middle, Ogden SD
Staff Assistant (co-teacher),
self-contained BD unit.

Mike has a life-changing impact on students. They work for him and make changes - because they want to, out of love and respect for him and themselves.



Christianne Drechsel

Resource assistant and TCM
Olympus Jr. High, Granite SD.
*A former student said, "I
consider Christianne to be
one of my best friends. She
always made me feel as if I
could succeed, no matter
how hard it was."*



Melinda Stevens

Early Intervention Assistant
Jordan SD
*The families that are
involved in Melinda's care
are getting excellent ser-
vices from a very knowl-
edgeable and dedicated
employee.*



Virginia Abplanalp

Title One Paraeducator
East Elementary, Duchesne County SD
*She is so positive, the students she works
with develop the ability to take a risk. They
believe in themselves enough to continue to
risk, knowing they will eventually succeed.*

Camille Sorenson

ESL Assistant, Gunnison
Elementary, So. Sanpete SD
*Mrs. Sorenson has really
been an advocate for our
Spanish students. Her
students know that she will
always help them.*



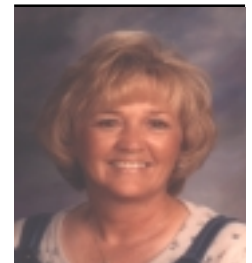
Nancy Stratton

Title 1 Aide, Heber Valley
Elementary, Wasatch SD
*Nancy is a true professional;
she is always there, pre-
pared, knowledgeable,
intuitive about children and
their learning.*



Karen Burraston

At-Risk Assistant
CBA Center, Millard SD
*Karen's ability to work with
the teachers, students,
parents and administration
make her an invaluable
member of our team.*



DON'T MISS OUT ! - BE ON OUR MAILING LIST. DON'T MISS OUT! - BE ON OUR MAILING LIST.

This first issue of *The PARagraph* was distributed at this year's State Paraeducator conference and to those who had previously attended. If you did not receive this copy at the conference or through the mail, and would like to be on our mailing list for future issues, please complete the form below and return it to: Jill Morgan (PARAgraph), USU, 6800 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6800.

Or e-mail: [jmorgan @ cc.usu.edu](mailto:jmorgan@cc.usu.edu)

Please pass this information on to colleagues.

Name: _____

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There is currently no charge for The PARagraph, but we may have to charge a small subscription. Please indicate below whether you think it would be reasonable to pay \$6 a year for The PARagraph (3 issues). Issues would be sent to your home address.

YES, I would be prepared to pay an annual subscription of \$6.

NO, I would not be prepared to pay an annual subscription of \$6.

Don't forget to include this information if you send you request via e-mail.

Make Paraeducation a Career!

Deb Andrews

Instructor, Salt Lake Community College Paraeducation Program

The Salt Lake Community College offers a certification program for students interested in or currently working as a paraeducator. The program includes instruction in basic skills for effectively dealing with academic, intellectual and behavioral disabilities, as well as students in programs such as Title I and Headstart. Specific issues addressed include:

- an overview of special education programs for students at-risk.
- special education law,
- roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in the classroom,
- positive interventions for dealing with difficult behaviors,
- strategies for effective academic instruction,.....and many others.

This is a great opportunity to network and have fun with other paraeducators! For more information about this program contact Gwen Bellon at (801) 957-3746 or Deb Andrews at (801) 567-8373. Or visit the Salt Lake Community College website (www.slcc.edu) and type the keyword "paraeducation" in the Search box.

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