

Widening the Circle

Celebrating Neurodiversity in Faith Based Schools

Focus Strategy:

The Basics of Hiring Inclusion Aides

When a private school enrolls a child with a significant disability, the school needs to discern whether that student needs additional adult assistance to be successful. There are several factors that impact that decision: safety, medical needs, mobility, and finances. Adult assistants can be volunteers or hired aides that may take the title of Inclusion Aide, Paraprofessional, or Special Education Aide.

Safety

The paramount reason to hire an Inclusion Aide is to maintain a safe environment for the child, the class, and the school. The factors that can compromise a child's safety are their cognitive ability or behavioral challenges. Some students with cognitive challenges may need adult assistance to prepare for transitions, guide them to appropriate locations, and assist during drills, lockdowns, or actual emergencies. When a child exhibits behavioral challenges, they may enter "fight, flight, or freeze" mode. In those instances, having an aide can help maintain safety by making sure they do not flee into an unsafe area or to continue supervising when they freeze in a separate location from the class.

Medical

Students with specific medical concerns may need adult assistance beyond what the classroom teacher can provide. Specifically, students that struggle with toileting consistency due to developmental delays. Parents can choose to waive their privacy rights by having an adult assist with toileting. Some students may need assistance with feeding or other medical necessities

Mobility

Students with visual, orthopedic, or physical impairments may need adult support to help with mobility. Aides can help navigate stairs, wheelchairs, and playground equipment.

Finances

How will the aide be compensated? Many schools opt to have the aide employed by the school so they can follow the school's employment protocols. In states with voucher systems, parents can use these funds to pay the aide's salary. Another option is for the school to add the aide salary into their operating budget. Many aides are part time and hourly, but they can be offered full time hours with benefits.



Qualifications

When working with students, the most important quality is disposition. Aides need to be loving and compassionate. They also need to be able to separate personal feelings from their professional work, as it is easy to create a bond with a child that can blur objectivity. Ultimately, we do not want students to become dependent on their aide. Aides should assist but not overhelp. Being able to fade support (step back when not needed) is critical.

Aides may be called on to assist with academics. Collaboration with the teacher is key to make sure they are delivering instruction consistent with expectations. In many instances, the aide will be the liaison between the parents and the school staff, keeping meticulous logs of daily events, celebrations, and concerns.

Training

Inclusion Aides are often not certified teachers, so the need for training is a high priority. Schools need to dedicate time and resources to ensuring that aides understand the knowledge and skills necessary to complete their tasks. Aides can attend conferences, participate in webinars, visit other classrooms and observe other aides, and/or receive coaching from interventionists and specialists.

Parent Connection:

Partnering with parents is essential when a student requires an instructional aide!

- Begin the conversation as early as possible to set expectations for communication (frequency and content).
- Plan to meet in scheduled intervals to consider the role of the aide, opportunity to fade support, or need to increase support.

Resources:

[Council for Exceptional Children training information](#)

[National Association of Special Education Teachers](#)

