

April 2010

RI Department of Education Teacher Assistants Newsletter



Promoting the Instructional Team model of teachers, teacher assistants and others ALL working together as valued team members to help students in Rhode Island achieve at high levels

Welcome to our Newsletter

This newsletter is produced by the RI Department of Education (RIDE) as a joint effort of the Office of Educator Quality & Certification & Office for Diverse Learners. Our purpose is to keep you up-to-date on policy & practice related to teacher assistants (TAs). You can download this newsletter & back issues of the newsletter from the TA website at www.ritap.org/ta on the Resources webpage.

RIDE's TA Contact:

Charlotte Diffendale
RI Department of Education
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903-3400
Phone: 401-222-8808
TTY: 800-745-5555

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TA Job Descriptions

A major theme in this newsletter is the role of TAs on instructional teams working in partnership with & under the direction & supervision of teachers. This issue provides articles on resources, research, & RIDE Guidelines related to TA roles, job descriptions, etc.

As reported in previous newsletters, since 2003, RIDE has annually surveyed local TA policy & practice via TA contacts in School Districts, Educational Collaboratives, State Operated Programs, Charter Schools & Non-Public Schools for Students with Special Needs through the use of RIDE's eRIDE system. 1 TA survey item is job descriptions. 2009 TA job description data are reported below for:

- ★ ALL – Data on all programs surveyed including districts +
- ★ Data on districts only - separate from "ALL".

Reponses to Items Related to TA Job Descriptions

- ★ **65% of ALL/57% districts** - 1 generic job description for all TAs.
- ★ **36% of ALL/54% districts** – Rather than having 1 generic job description, have multiple job descriptions for different positions.
- ★ **32% of ALL/26% districts** – Use performance-based job descriptions.
- ★ **45% of ALL/49% districts** – Have job descriptions aligned with RIDE Standards for TA knowledge & skills, RIDE Guidelines for specific positions (Speech/Language, English as a Second Language, Behavior, Diverse Academic Needs & Community-Based Instruction), & RIDE Guidelines for Supervision, Guidelines for Instructional Teams, Supervision & Performance Evaluation (available on TA website).
- ★ **26% of ALL/2% districts** - Use job description strategies/resources cited in the Effective Use of Teacher Assistants: A Module for Policy & Practice Development (available on TA website)

The full statewide report is available on the TA website at www.ritap.org/ta on the "About Us" webpage. Although data are provided on a statewide aggregated basis (individual districts or programs not being identified), the statewide report can be a tool in seeing how your district/program compares with others. The full report shows comparative data over multiple years, showing maintenance or growth of TA policy & practice supports in all categories over time. Survey items address:

- ★ Guidelines for TA Assignment
- ★ Job Descriptions
- ★ TA Orientation
- ★ Training Teachers on Effective TA Use
- ★ Instructional Team Supports
- ★ TA Performance Evaluation
- ★ Professional Development
- ★ Career Ladder
- ★ TA Recruitment
- ★ TA Retention
- ★ Substitute TA Use
- ★ RICERT TA

IRIS Center PD Resources

The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements is a national center that aims to provide through its website at <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/> high-quality resources for college & university faculty & PD providers in districts & other educational programs who conduct inservice training for practicing educators about students with disabilities. IRIS provides free, online, interactive training enhancements that translate research about the education of students with disabilities into practice. Their website has modules, case studies, activities, information briefs & podcasts on a range of topics, e.g., Accommodations; Assessment (including progress monitoring); Behavior; Collaboration; Content Instruction; Differentiated Instruction; Disability; Diversity; Learning Strategies; Math; Response to Intervention (RTI); Reading, Literacy, Language Arts; & School Improvement; & Transition.

The website is appropriate for use with a variety of audiences, including, in some instances, TAs & those with whom they work. For example, one of the Information Briefs that you can download from their website under the topic "collaboration" is entitled, WORKING TOGETHER: TEACHER-PARAEDUCATOR COLLABORATION (see article in the next column).

You can also access this website on the TA Website at <http://www.ritap.org/ta>, go to Training Opportunities & then to Online Professional Development for TAs). In addition to links to the IRIS Center, the TA website has links for a variety of other online PD resources: some designed specifically for TAs & others for a broader audience & covering topics such as literacy, math, technology, etc.

Working Together: Teacher-Paraeducator Collaboration

The article, Working Together: Teacher-Paraeducator Collaboration, can be downloaded from the IRIS Center for Training Enhancements website under "collaboration". It was developed in 2005 by the Access Center: Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8. It discusses collaboration elements for teacher/TA teams:

- ★ Define roles – See article on page 5 of this newsletter for RIDE Guidelines on Teacher/TA roles on instructional teams.
- ★ Develop a schedule
- ★ Know instructional methods
- ★ Be aware of student characteristics
- ★ Share classroom experiences
- ★ Share responsibility for students

The following paraphrases Table 1: Roles & Responsibilities, p. 2.

	Teacher Role	TA Role	Communication
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan all instruction • Provide whole-class instruction (to introduce new content) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group on specific tasks including review or re-teaching • 1:1 intensive instruction or remediation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers give TAs specific content & guidance re: curriculum, students & materials • TAs report student progress to teacher
Curriculum & Lesson Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop all lesson plans & materials • Ensure aligned with standards, student needs & IEPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help develop activities, get materials, coordinate activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual review of plans before class • Teacher guidance about specific instructional methods
Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop & guide class-wide management plans for behavior & class structures • Develop/monitor individual behavior plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help implement class-wide & individual behavior plans • Monitor hallways, study hall & other activities outside class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher guidance about specific behavior strategies & student characteristics • TAs report student progress to teacher
Accommodations & Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine with IEP team proper accommodations for students with disabilities & use in all plans • Modify materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided by teacher, use appropriate accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher ensures TAs know IEP goals & adaptations • TAs report student progress to teacher
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine, create & administer appropriate formal & informal assessments • Determine formal assessment modifications & accommodations • Use assessment results to plan & develop curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help administer assessments as appropriate • Implement assessment accommodations • Regularly collect anecdotal student information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher guidance about content & implementation of assessments • TAs report student progress to teacher • Mutual conversations about anecdotal information & informal student data collection

TA Research re: Literacy

Cobb, Charlene. (2007) **Training paraprofessionals to effectively work with all students.** *The Reading Teacher*, 60(7), 686-689. This article recognizes the vital role TAs can play in assisting with literacy achievement for all students. IRA (International Reading Association) Standards for Reading Professionals (access at <http://www.reading.org/downloads/resources/545standards2003/index.html>) include expectations for both reading professionals & TAs re:

- ★ Foundational knowledge
- ★ Instructional strategies & curriculum materials
- ★ Assessment, diagnosis & evaluation
- ★ Creating a literate environment
- ★ Professional development

The author describes a cost effective PD series that a reading specialist can easily customize to his/her program/student population. It has 3 components:

- ★ **Needs Assessment** – Survey teachers to find out reading strategies they use most often. Use this information to decide on the content of your TA PD.
- ★ **TA PD** – Plan sessions, usually 45-60 minutes each, 1 topic per session, e.g., fluency, word study, comprehension, etc. The agenda outline: background, explanation/rationale for instructional strategies, practical applications, paired or small group practice, debrief & discussion of application to TA settings. Have handouts & encourage TAs to put in a notebook for easy reference.
- ★ **Follow-up & Consultation** – Give teachers an explanation of the TA PD including any handouts, e.g., at a staff meeting or via email. During future TA PD, debrief on strategies TAs tried with consultation as needed. At some point, e.g., semester end, survey teachers on TA PD impact & additional TA PD needs.

TA Resources at Paul V. Sherlock Center at RIC

The Sherlock Center is a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). It offers *training, technical assistance, service, research, & information sharing* to promote the membership of individuals with disabilities in school, work, & the community. The Sherlock Center partners with state & local government agencies, schools, institutions of higher education, & community providers to reach more than 25,000 people each year.

NEW Resource Library - In December 2009, the Sherlock Center moved to a new location on RI College's East Campus. In addition to classroom & meeting space, the Center has a Resource Library open to the public. It has more than 2,000 resources. Starting in May 2010, their website will feature a searchable database of library holdings & provide the opportunity to reserve materials directly from the site.

Teachers, TAs & others are welcome to browse the library for books, journals, videos, & other resources specific to disabilities. Visitors can use library computers to search for materials or access resources through other RI libraries. The Resource Library is typically open from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday – Friday, year-round including summer. Some evening hours may be added this fall. Check their website!

Adapted Literature – A Unique Resource for Educators! - Sherlock Center staff has adapted a variety of popular children's literature using 'Writing with Symbols'. Stories are presented using simplified language accompanied by pictures &/or symbols. These abridged versions are intended to help include a child with significant disabilities in the general education classroom. Teachers may request a book for adaptation. These requests are considered as resources permit.

The Resource Library includes more than 100 Adapted Literature items. Some titles are available in electronic format & can be downloaded directly from their website. Stories adapted to PowerPoint include sounds/music & allow a student to "click" along using a computer & mouse/switch. The literature was initially developed by Sherlock Center staff & shared with teachers as examples of using the general education curriculum as a basis for student learning for students with severe disabilities. Literature covers both fiction & non-fiction & mirrors books used in general education. The library grows each year as students in undergraduate & graduate courses further develop literature for their classrooms, adding their work to the Sherlock Center Resource Library. High school students have also developed literature for senior projects.

Sample List of Adapted Literature: A Tale of Two Cities; Bear Stays Up; Beowulf; Big Pumpkin; Black Beauty; Bonnie on the Beach; Cam Jansen Baseball Mystery; Charlotte's Web; Cloudy, with a Chance of Meatballs; Corduroy; Franklin has a Sleepover; Golden Egg; Harry Potter & the Chamber of Secrets; Hatchet; Holes; How the Grinch Stole Christmas; If You Bring a Mouse to School; Lion, Witch, & Wardrobe; The Little Red Hen; Little Women; The Mitten; The Nutcracker; The Odyssey; The Outsiders; Polar Express; Pride & Prejudice; The Princess & the Pea; R is for RI Red; Rainbow Fish; Robin Hood: Romeo & Juliet; Secret Garden; Snowy Day; The Very Hungry Caterpillar; Twilight; Velveteen Rabbit; Where the Wild Things Are & much more. A complete list of Adapted Literature is on our website.

For more information on the Sherlock Center & the Resource Library, go to www.sherlockcenter.org or call (401) 456-8072 voice, (401) 456-8773 TDD.

ESP of the Year

Cheryl Palumbo, a Barrington TA, was nominated by NEARI as the 2010 Educational Support Personnel (ESP). While she did not win the national award, she clearly merits recognition of her many contributions at local & state levels. Her commitment to students, educational excellence & teamwork with others permeates all that she does.

Local TA Activities

- ★ Member of task force (including Steering Committee) that developed Barrington's performance-based TA job description aligned with RIDE standards. (Access on TA website, Resources Webpage)
- ★ Helped provide leadership for district's Instructional TEAM Initiative that:
 - Facilitated district-wide use of job description & strategies to promote teachers & TAs working together as effective instructional teams.
 - Developed district performance-based TA evaluation protocol aligned with its job description (Also on TA website).
- ★ Cheryl & other district staff co-presented with RIDE staff on RIDE's standards for instructional teams & district's Instructional TEAM model at Nat'l Conference for Paraprofessionals & Related Service Providers in Seattle.

State Level TA Activities

- ★ Participant & presenter at RIDE's TA Networks.
- ★ On Local Arrangements Committee for Nat'l Conference for Paraprofessionals & Related Service Providers when it was held in RI in 2004.
- ★ On 2007 RIDE Task Force that developed RIDE Guidelines for TAs Who Support Students with Diverse Academic Needs.
- ★ In 2007, chosen by district to (1) be trained in RICERT TA & (2) support district rollout.

District Spotlight: Narragansett TA Policy & Practice

Lyn Budaj, Lbudaj@narragansett.k12.ri.us, 792-9450, is Narragansett's TA Contact. The district employs 35 TAs - all qualified as instructional TAs & assigned to various TA positions throughout the district.

District supports for effective TA use include:

- ★ Have local guidelines for TA assignment that reflect (1) individual class &/or student needs, (2) IEP determination, (3) some TA assignments requiring special training. Have a probation/trial period of 6 months for TAs in new assignments. Have local guidelines based on "Considerations for Assigning TAs" cited in the Effective Use of TAs: A Module for Policy & Practice Development Use" (Access on TA website, Resources Webpage).
- ★ Have multiple (5) performance-based job descriptions for different positions, e.g., 1 generic job description plus others as needed designed for students with unique needs.
- ★ Have a specific TA orientation to the school to which they are assigned, orienting newly hired TAs via training specific to the position by the TA's immediate supervisor (usually the teacher). This includes reviewing with the TA each student's strengths & challenges; introducing staff; reviewing school policies & procedures; reviewing respective teacher/TA roles & responsibilities; discussing teacher/TA work styles & skills to develop a team approach that maximizes the strengths & preferences of both; & identifying job-specific duties that build on the TA's job description.
- ★ Building principals ensure that teachers are aware of federal & state law that require that TAs work under the supervision & direction of the teacher. Make teachers aware of RIDE Guidelines for Instructional Teams, Supervision & Performance Evaluation. Use routine meetings with teachers to discuss various issues, including effective TA use.
- ★ Encourage teachers & TAs to attend training together – as a team.
- ★ Annual TA evaluations are performance-based, linked to TA job descriptions & conducted by an administrator with a mechanism for input from the TA's teacher & for the TA to do a self-evaluation.
- ★ Make TAs aware of the need for ongoing PD, requiring TAs to complete PD every year. Offer 2 PD days annually for TAs to attend for which they get paid. This year, provided 12 hours of PD on varied topics depending on schools in which TAs work as this is job-embedded PD. Encourage TAs to attend RIDE TA Networks. Allow cross-program visitation so TAs can observe other programs. Encourage TAs to attend appropriate in-district teacher in-service training. Keep TAs informed of state & local TA issues & resources through dissemination of electronic & written information. Circulate RIDE's TA Newsletter.
- ★ Career ladder includes extra pay for TAs based on longevity. TAs can take educational leave of absences. They fund TAs to take job-related college courses. They promote from within.
- ★ Recruit TAs through the newspaper & their PTO. A pool of qualified substitute TAs is available from which to draw permanent TAs.
- ★ TA salary & benefits are incentives for recruiting & retaining TAs. Retention is supported by opportunities for PD offered by or through the district. Have a good working environment & good working relationship with the union representing TAs. Having teachers who know how to effectively work with TAs in an instructional team approach is also a factor in TA retention.
- ★ RICERT TA System is in place in the district. TAs have been trained in its use. The system provides data useful for various administrative functions including documenting PD. PD interest data are used to plan district PD activities.

Autism Networks

The ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders) Network assists school personnel (including TAs), families & students in developing quality programs for students with ASD that meet the same high standards established for all students. The network offers training on various ASD-related topics. Sessions are free & held 4:00-6:00 p.m. at the RI College in the Gaige Auditorium.

Upcoming ASD Network:

★ May 12, 2010, Topic: "Social/Emotional Supports"

REGISTER ONLINE for the ASD Network on the ASD website at <http://www.ritap.org/asd/>. This website has a variety of helpful information & links related to workshops, support services, resources, best practices & an informative PSA (Public Service Announcement) video. Check it out!

TA Newsletter Distribution

We email this newsletter to District TA Contacts; State Union TA Contacts; Principals; Special Ed. Directors; Title I Coordinators; Ed. Collaboratives; RIDE Approved TA Training Programs; Teacher Prep Programs & our TA Master Email List. To get a copy:

★ Get on our TA Master Email List. Mail, fax or email name, phone & email to: Shirley Medeiros; RIDE; Office of Educator Quality & Certification; Shepard Building; 255 Westminster St.; Providence, RI 02903; Fax: 401-222-2048; shirley.medeiros@ride.ri.gov

OR

★ Go to www.ritap.org/ta - Resources webpage. Download this or back newsletters. You can also subscribe to the newsletter online

OR

★ Ask someone in your district (Another TA, principal or TA Contact) to make you a copy.

RIDE Guidelines on Teacher/TA Teams

RIDE Standards & Guidelines re: TAs are on the TA website at www.ritap.org/ta, Legal Requirements webpage. Section II of the guidelines covers Instructional Teams, Supervision & Performance Evaluation re: TAs in both school-based & community-based instructional settings. Guidelines address (1) the Instructional Team Model, (2) Supervision of TAs & (3) Performance Evaluation of TAs. The Instructional Team Model section addresses Roles & Responsibilities (for Teachers & TAs):

Teachers:

1. Design, implement, & evaluate instruction;
2. Collaborate with families around instruction & other concerns;
3. Consult with colleagues;
4. Plan programs;
5. As applicable, participate in meetings to develop the IEP;
6. Carry out classroom administrative tasks; &
7. Coordinate TA work including:
 - Set goals & plans;
 - Schedule & assign duties within the classroom or team;
 - Direct & monitor day-to-day performance;
 - Provide feedback; &
 - Provide job embedded/on-the-job training.
8. *For community-based instruction, plan, facilitate & evaluate community-based instruction, including:*
 - *Initiate contact with the community placement site & negotiate plans for the student & TA.*
 - *Ensure that the TA understands & is able to meet expectations for the role of TA assisting with community-based instruction including emergency, health & safety factors.*
 - *Ensure the TA's comfort level with the student by orientation to student strengths & needs including "red flags" & appropriate intervention strategies to prevent failure in community experiences.*
 - *Design communication protocols for instruction provided outside the presence of the teacher & ensure that the TA is competent in its use. Use data reported by the TA in ensuring continuity in instruction between school & community settings.*
 - *Periodically review the TA's work & student progress.*

Teacher Assistants: Under the direction of the teacher,

1. Perform informal assessment activities;
2. Observe & record information of student performance;
3. Assist with instruction;
4. Assist with behavior management;
5. Provide off-site community-based opportunities for students, if appropriate to the job assignment, *providing instruction, supervision & monitoring of community-based opportunities & being aware of school policies & procedures for both school & community settings;*
6. Facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education;
7. Assist students' achievement outside of the classroom, e.g., computer lab, library;
8. Have knowledge of & practice standard health care precautions. *For community-based instruction, this includes both school & community settings;*
9. Monitor playgrounds, lunchrooms, etc.;
10. Assist with follow-through for related services, e.g., speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy. *For community-based instruction, this assistance is provided as it relates to the community experience;*
11. Maintain student & family confidentiality.
12. *For community-based instruction, communicate with community-based instruction site & the teacher & cultivate positive relationships with community-based representatives & the school.*

TA Role in Using Educational Technology & Assistive Technology

At the April 2010 TA Networks, Lisa Labitt presented on the TA's Role in Using Educational Technology & Assistive Technology. Her presentation addressed:

- ★ Educational technology to use in the classroom
- ★ Engaging students using technology tools for research, reading & writing
- ★ Using info & resources available online for mathematics & literacy
- ★ Universal design in learning
- ★ Supporting students using assistive technology

According to Vygotsky, students need to be able to: (1) recognize information, ideas, & concepts; (2) apply effective strategies to process the information; & (3) be engaged in the process. Technology use addresses these student learning issues, providing tools to reduce the gap between potential & performance, especially for students who struggle to learn. TAs can play a key role in supporting student technology use given their typically close working relationship with students. It is important for TAs to have a basic knowledge related to technology in general & have training specific to individual student unique technology needs or use.

She clarified the distinction between educational technology & assistive technology. Educational technology takes many different forms & can be used with all students including those with & without special needs. She reviewed a variety of educational technology resources & their use including numerous websites (many free) for accessing technology tools for research, reading, writing & math.

Assistive technology is specifically designed for students with special needs to help them access the curriculum, e.g., hearing aids, prosthetic devices, magnifiers, etc. Not all students with special needs require assistive technology. In fact, universally designed curriculum & materials can meet the special needs of many students as well as benefiting students without special needs.

Assistive Technology Resources in RI:

- ★ ATAP (Assistive Technology Access Partnership) – www.atap.state.ri.us is designed as a statewide partnership of organizations, each with a targeted assistive technology focus, working together to improve access to & acquisition of assistive technology for individuals with disabilities. ATAP's main initiatives are: (1) Device Demonstration; (2) Device Loan; (3) Device Re-Use; & (4) Training, Public Awareness, Collaboration, Information & Referral. ATAP Partners include: Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL); East Bay Educational Collaborative (EBEC); Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL); PARI Independent Living Center; & TechACCESS of RI.
- ★ Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL) - www.atel.ri.gov provides demonstrations, training & long term loan & device reutilization services of specialized telephone equipment to qualified individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, have a speech impairment, or who suffer from neuromuscular damage or disease, that hinders them from using a standard telephone.
- ★ ATAP Children & Youth Resource Center at East Bay Educational Collaborative (EBEC) – www.ebecri.org where you can contact Lisa Labitt (presenter at this TA Network session). The center serves districts at a reduced cost. Typical services include: (1) Student evaluations; (2) Consultations with teachers, other professionals or TAs; (3) Consultation with parents; (4) Use of equipment from an AT lending library; (5) Specific device training; & (6) In-class computer training.
- ★ Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL) - www.oscil.org/ is a consumer controlled, community based, nonprofit organization providing independent living services to enhance, through self-direction, the quality of life of Rhode Islanders with significant disability & promote integration into the community. OSCIL's website assists persons with disabilities, their family & friends, service providers & the community at large with a variety of information to help break down barriers & increase access in home & community.
- ★ PARI Independent Living Center - www.pari-ilc.org/ works with people with any kind of disability to identify goals & provide training, equipment, advocacy, & counseling to help them to achieve their goals. Whether seeking medical resources, new ways of performing activities of daily life, transportation, housing, or ways of becoming involved in the community, the PARI Independent Living Center is the individual's professional resource for reaching independence.
- ★ TechACCESS of RI - www.techaccess-ri.org is a resource center serving as RI's central information, resource, & demonstration site re: assistive technology for people with disabilities. Assistive technology is any device that helps a person with a disability function better at home, work, school, or in the community. TechACCESS has PD on a range of topics, many of interest to TAs who work with students who need Assistive Technology. For more information on registering for this PD, go to www.techaccess-ri.org, click on Calendar, & then click on Professional Development Opportunities.