

Inclusive Education

Conversation Guide for the video: *Rethinking the Role of Educational Assistants*

Under the direction of a teacher, an educational assistant can fulfill a variety of valued roles that support teacher effectiveness and student success.



Key understandings

- Over the past decade, the number of educational assistants working in Alberta schools has increased dramatically.
- New research shows that there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of one-to-one educational assistants as the primary support for students with disabilities.
- Unintentional effects of one-to-one support can include unnecessary adult dependency, isolation from classmates, inhibition of opportunities for choice and creativity and decreased engagement of the teacher and student.
- One-to-one support should be among the last choices after other options have been considered.
- Finding more natural ways for educational assistants to support students can reduce unnecessary dependence on adults. This could include working with the whole class or checking in periodically with individual students rather than sitting beside them.
- Working as a team, teachers and educational assistants can look for opportunities to step back and deliberately fade one-to-one adult support to promote independence, facilitate peer relationships and maximize student opportunities to learn and grow.

“Support that encourages independence or interdependence during school best prepares students for life outside school.”

Causton-Theoharris, J. (2009). *The Paraprofessional's handbook for effective support in inclusive classrooms*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co.

Learn more about inclusive education: <https://education.alberta.ca/inclusive-education>

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Questions for discussion

- How does this video affirm or challenge your own understanding and experience in working with educational assistants?
- From your experience, give some examples of situations where educational assistants' roles in the classroom effectively supported teacher effectiveness and student success. What were the factors that helped these work well?
- How would you respond to an educator, staff member or parent who believes that a particular student's unique learning needs can only be met with the assignment of a one-to-one educational assistant?
- How can we support educators and educational assistants in building their understanding and confidence around more natural supports for students with disabilities?

Taking the Pulse at the School and Authority Level



- How are staff members and educational assistants collaborating to build their capacity in the classroom?
- How are the learning needs of the educational assistants being addressed through systematic professional development?

Adapted from A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions, www.essentialconditions.ca

Research

- [The Golden Rule of Providing Support in Inclusive Classrooms: Support Others as You Would Wish to be Supported](#) - In this article, Julie Causton-Theoharis encourages educators to consider the golden rule of support in inclusive classrooms: support others as you would wish to be supported.

More Information

- [Peer Mentoring to Support Students with Disabilities](#) - This Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium (ERLC) video resource provides information on using natural supports and peer mentors to support students with disabilities.
- [Learning Technologies: Information for Teachers](#) - This Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium (ERLC) resource provides information on using technology to support students with disabilities.
- [Learning for All](#) - This resource offers information, strategies and references for working with and strengthening educational assistants' practice.

Alberta Examples

The following Alberta school authorities are among those who have developed staff resources on the role of educational assistants:

- Canadian Rockies Public Schools—The [Inclusive Education Procedures](#) resource details the role and responsibilities of an education assistant (pp. 37–38).
- Clearview Public Schools—[Teacher assistant position descriptions](#) included for “Educational Assistant” (pp. 96-98).