

# A Manual for State or District-wide Adoption of CO-TOP

## A Systematic, Comprehensive, and Sustainable In-Service Paraeducator Training Program



University of Colorado  
Denver

School of Education & Human Development

Ritu Chopra, Ph.D., Executive Director

E-mail: [ritu.chopra@ucdenver.edu](mailto:ritu.chopra@ucdenver.edu)

Veronica Hepworth M. A., Project Coordinator

E-mail: [veronica.hepworth@ucdenver.edu](mailto:veronica.hepworth@ucdenver.edu)

University of Colorado Denver  
School of Education and Human Development  
Campus Box 106, PO Box 173364  
Denver, CO 80217-3364  
Phone: (303) 315-6355, fax: (303) 315-6367  
Website: <http://www.paracenter.org>

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## INTRODUCTION

Paraeducators are support personnel who have been employed in education to deliver an array of instructional services to students for many years. They are also known as teacher assistants, educational assistants, aides, and instructional assistants. Paraeducators currently constitute the most rapidly growing portion of the special education workforce. While they technically work “along side” the teacher, they are frequently assigned on behalf of individual students or hired into federally funded programs and they spend their time “along side” students rather than “along side” teachers. In fact, they most often work in locations away from the teacher (French & Chopra, 1999). Paraeducators have little or no preparation to perform their duties and school professionals have little preparation to supervise them (French, 2001).

The CO-TOP Model was designed to deliver training to paraeducators. This manual is designed by the PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center at the University of Colorado at Denver to guide schools, districts, or state agencies in the adoption of the CO-TOP paraeducator training model.

## WHY TRAIN PARAEDUCATORS?

There are several compelling reasons for paraeducators to be well trained and qualified for the positions they hold.

### *Legislative Mandates Require Paraeducators To Be Trained*

The 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the establishment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) require states to address in-service and pre-service preparation of all personnel including paraeducators.

### *Paraeducators Teach Even Though They Are Not Teachers*

In this role, paraeducators need training in areas such as instructional methods, teamwork, and behavior management, facilitating interactions with typical peers, use of technology, maintaining confidentiality, fostering independence in students, and providing personal care.

## *Paraeducators Work with Students with the Most Challenging Educational Needs*

While student populations across the country have increased in diversity, the emphasis on high academic standards and achievement has increased the need for individualized and intensive supports for students. Students who have certain educational disadvantages can benefit from additional assistance, but budget limitations prevent most districts from increasing the numbers of teachers to address the intensity of student needs. Paraeducators are frequently employed to provide the individualized and intensive support.

### *Paraeducators are cost-effective*

Hiring nonprofessional personnel has made it possible for districts to provide services to students while balancing the budget. Paraeducators are typically hourly employees, paid at rates that vary according to the local economy, but tend to result in annual incomes approximately equivalent to one third of the average professional's salary. It makes good economic sense to employ a variety of staff members at varying pay levels if the roles can be ethically and legally differentiated, and the responsibilities distributed.

### *Use Of Untrained Paraeducators Can Raise Liability For School Districts*

On one hand there is a growing appreciation for what paraeducators do, on the other hand, increasingly, the use of lesser-trained people to support students who have intense educational needs has been legally contested (Katsyannis, Hodge & Lanford, 2000). Additionally, the ethical response to the cost-effective solution of hiring unprepared personnel is to provide on-the-job training to ensure the desired student outcomes.

## *College Level Preparation Remains Inaccessible for the Majority of Paraeducators*

One way to provide training to paraeducators is through the community college system. Community colleges are rapidly developing programs in response to the No Child Left Behind requirement and are recognized as the appropriate venue for pre-service paraeducator training (French & Cabell, 1993). There are numerous barriers that exist, however.

1. Community colleges are not available in every community and paraeducators may be reluctant to travel distances to attend.
2. Even though there are some sources of financial aid available, the prospect of college expenses may keep paraeducators from investigating the possibilities.
3. Paraeducators may not have sufficient academic skills to take college level courses. Often, paraeducators require developmental coursework to prepare for college material, but these courses add to the overall cost of the process.
4. College courses are not necessarily offered at convenient times for paraeducators. Paraeducators are typically parents with family responsibilities as well as daytime jobs. Courses offered during the day conflict with the work schedule and courses offered in the evening require arrangements for day-care or alternate family arrangements.
5. The rapid development of community college programs may or may not result in courses of study based on empirical information about the roles and duties of paraeducators, their prior knowledge or specific training needs.

## *Paraeducators Are Not Well-Supervised*

Paraeducators often work with teachers who do not know how to best utilize their services or to direct their work. Rarely are teachers prepared to provide mentorship or coaching for paraeducators in how to access higher education. Administrators may also be unprepared to guide and coach teachers in this role and administrators rarely have the time to provide such mentoring themselves.

## WHAT IS CO-TOP AND HOW DOES CO-TOP ADDRESS THE PROBLEM?

CO-TOP provides in-service training to already-employed paraeducators who may have little preparation to do their jobs, and may or may not have prior college education. The program is owned and controlled by the district. Administrators make decisions based on local needs, demands and resources about how and when to provide training. The training is delivered through a local network or “Cadre” of CO-TOP-trained trainers who teach classes in school district buildings, using the CO-TOP curriculum. The CO-TOP Curriculum consists of Instructors’ Manuals for 21 courses that are research-based, field tested with over 10,000 paraeducators. The curriculum is continuously refined using pre and post assessments of paraeducator knowledge and skills, recommendations of trainers, reports from paraeducators, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders.

Based on the research findings of French & Cabell (1993), the underlying premises of the CO-TOP Model is that initial paraeducator training is best when it:

- Is in school buildings rather than college campus classrooms;
- Is in locations, at times and on days that are convenient to paraeducators;
- Provides job-specific information
- It avoids theoretical information relevant to teachers but not paraeducators;
- Provides college credits
- Involves teachers and related services providers in the instruction, mentoring, monitoring, and coaching of paraeducators.

## CONCEPTS THAT FRAME THE CO-TOP FEATURES

CO-TOP CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/ RESEARCH BASIS	CO-TOP MODEL FEATURES
<p>⇒ Training for inservice, currently-employed, but untrained, paraeducators occurs best locally (French &amp; Cabell, 1993; French, &amp; Lee, 1998).</p>	<p>⇒ <b>Training of Trainers</b> Model allows districts to develop a local cadre of trainers through which they can provide inservice training according to local needs, preferences, schedules (with or without external funding)</p>
<p>⇒ School professionals are not currently well-prepared to supervise or train paraeducators (French, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2001; French &amp; Chopra, 1999; French, &amp; Lee, 1998; French &amp; Pickett, 1997; Morgan, 1997; Vasa et al, 1982), but there are skills that may be taught to teachers to enhance their supervisory skills (French, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d, 2000, 2003).</p> <p>⇒ Pre-service teacher education does not include specific information about supervising paraprofessionals (Boomer, 1980, 1982; French, 1998; Heller, 1997; Lindeman &amp; Beegle, 1988; May &amp; Marozas, 1986).</p> <p>⇒ Teacher is an executive of the classroom and must perform executive functions including provision of orientation to the job, time management, delegation, planning, on-the-job training, evaluation, (Berliner, 1983a, 1983b; French, 1997).</p>	<p>⇒ <b>Paraeducator Supervision Academy (PSA)</b> provides specific skill building in supervision components</p>
<p>⇒ Experienced, well-educated school professionals are readily available human resources, are well-suited and capable of providing training to paraeducators locally with appropriate support and training, and training of trainers models are among the most powerful staff development tools available (French &amp; Cabell, 1993; Joyce &amp; Showers, 1980; Lynn, L. 1999)</p>	<p>⇒ <b>Trainers of Paraeducators (TOPA) Academy</b> provides the skills of teaching adults and curricular materials for paraeducators to local trainers</p>
<p>⇒ Paraeducator inservice training curriculum should be data based, modular, relevant and practical (Evans &amp; Evans, 1986; Escudero &amp; Seras, 1982; Frank, Keith &amp; Steil, 1988; French &amp; Cabell, 1993; French &amp; Chopra, 1999; Pearman, Suhr &amp; Gibson, 1993; Pickett, 1999)</p>	<p>⇒ <b>CO-TOP Academies</b> (courses) are divided into modules, are based on empirical evidence of paraeducator needs (needs assessments, studies of paraeducator scopes of responsibility, skills and knowledge), have been field tested and found relevant and practical</p>
<p>⇒ Training provided to paraeducators must be systematically documented and should lead to a certificate, A.A. degree, and/or should apply to teaching license (Fideler, 1996; Frith &amp; Lindsey, 1982; Haselkorn &amp; Fideler 1996; Genzok, Lavandez &amp; Krashen, 1994; Gordon, 1994; Hill, Carjuzaa, Aramburo &amp; Baca, 1993; Pickett, 1986)</p>	<p>⇒ CO-TOP establishes, in each state, a <b>coalition of stakeholders</b> to address problems associated with paraeducator training</p>



## CO-TOP TERMS/DEFINITIONS

### **Coalition**

A decision-making group of administrators in building specific or program specific roles (e.g. federal programs, human resources, staff development), paraeducators, teachers, college faculty, and parents. The Coalition seeks solutions to the ongoing challenges of paraeducator employment, career development, and training. The Coalition guides and plans implementation of the CO-TOP model (e.g. determining training needs, course scheduling, nominating / selecting participants, procuring funding, monitoring and sustaining quality of trainer and paraeducator training, etc.)

### **PSA (Paraeducator Supervision Academy)**

A course designed for teachers and other school professionals who supervise paraeducators and includes knowledge about paraeducators and their roles, laws and policies, legal, ethical and liability issues, but also addresses the skills essential to supervision of paraeducators.

### **TOPA (Trainers of Paraeducators Academy)**

A course designed for targeted individuals who become members of the local cadre or network of trainers and who have completed the prerequisite - PSA. This course introduces the CO-TOP curriculum and instructs school professionals on the adult learning needs of paraeducators, as well as effective pedagogical techniques.

### **Cadre of Trainers**

The CO-TOP Cadre of Trainers exists at three levels. First, each participating district or agency has a cadre of trainers who meet together to plan cohesive, comprehensive training locally. Second, all local trainers belong to a statewide network or Cadre of Trainers. Third, a nationwide Cadre of Trainers consists of CO-TOP trainers across many states and countries. Trainers may join an on-line support system as they continue their work as trainers.

### **CO-TOP Academy**

This is the name the PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center has given to the courses in the CO-TOP Curriculum for paraeducators, which consists of 21 academes and a practicum or field experience. Each course may be taught alone or they may be taught in topical clusters – at the discretion of the district.

**CO-TOP COURSE NUMBERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO - DENVER**

Course Title	Type of Credit	Credit	Course Number
Paraeducator Supervision Academy (PSA)	Graduate	1.0	EDUC 5010
Trainers of Paraeducators Academy (TOPA)	Graduate	1.0	EDUC 5020
Training of Paraeducators-Cadre of Trainers (TOPCAT )	Graduate	1.0	EDUC 5836
Instructional Teamwork	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4700
Student Supervision	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4710
Interpersonal Skills	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4720
Personal Growth & Development	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4730
Behavior Management	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4740
Instructional Strategies	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4750
Instructional Technologies	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4760
Vocabulary and Comprehension	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4770
Phonemic Awareness & Phonics	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4780
Reading Fluency	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4790
Significant Health Support Needs	Undergraduate	1.0	SPED 4710
Significant Behavior Support Needs	Undergraduate	1.0	SPED 4720
Significant Communication Support Needs	Undergraduate	1.0	SPED 4730
Life Skills	Undergraduate	1.0	SPED 4740
Orientation to Special Education	Undergraduate	1.0	SPED 4750
Autism Spectrum Disorders Academy	undergraduate	1.0	SPED 4200
Orientation to Bilingual Education	Undergraduate	1.0	LLC 4810
Language Development and Acquisition	Undergraduate	1.0	LLC 4820
Instructional Methods for Second Language Learners	Undergraduate	1.0	LLC 4830
Grades K-4 Mathematics	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4800
Number Theory and Rational Numbers	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4810
Algebraic Concepts and Spatial Reasoning	Undergraduate	1.0	ITE 4820
CO-TOP Special Education Practicum	Undergraduate	2.0	SPED 4919
CO-TOP English Language Acquisition Practicum	Undergraduate	2.0	LLC 4919
CO-TOP Literacy Practicum	Undergraduate	2.0	ITE *

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE ARTICULATION OF CO-TOP ACADEMIES

The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center has successfully established agreements with the Colorado Community College System whereby the CO-TOP Special Education paraeducator courses taken in local districts through local trainers will apply toward an associate degree. The following table shows how one-credit-hour CO-TOP classes combine to apply towards 3 credit hour courses at the community college level.

CO-TOP Academy Clusters	Community College Equivalent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional Teamwork</li> <li>• Interpersonal Skills</li> <li>• Significant Communication Support Needs</li> </ul>	EDU 111- Communication Skills with Special Populations for Paraeducators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Supervision</li> <li>• Behavior Management</li> <li>• Significant Supports for Challenging Behaviors</li> </ul>	EDU 114 - Student Behavior Management for Paraeducators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant Health Support Needs, and</li> <li>• CPR and First Aid Certificate from Red Cross or like agency</li> </ul>	EDU 112 - Health and Safety Issues in Schools for Paraeducators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation to Special Education</li> <li>• Instructional Technology</li> <li>• Life Skills</li> </ul>	EDU 110 - Overview of Special Populations for Paraeducators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation to Bilingual Education</li> <li>• Language Development and Acquisition</li> <li>• Instructional Methods for Second Language Learners</li> </ul>	EDU 232 - Literacy in the Multi Cultural/ Multi Lingual Classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional Strategies</li> <li>• Choice of 1 reading and 1 math assisting course</li> </ul>	EDU 141 - Basic Instructional Techniques for Paraeducators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CO-TOP Practicum</li> <li>• Personal Growth &amp; Development</li> </ul>	EDU 115 - Paraeducator Practicum

## WHY CO-TOP?

The CO-TOP model is a feasible solution to paraeducator training needs because it is comprehensive, systematic, and sustainable.

### *CO-TOP is comprehensive because it:*

- Considers variations within job responsibilities of various paraeducator positions, and offers a menu of relevant courses
- Is based on curriculum validated by experts and field-tested with paraeducators
- Is specific to the roles and responsibilities that paraeducators perform
- Delivers curriculum that incorporates national and local policies and procedures
- Addresses the training needs of paraeducators as adult learners
- May be offered as frequently or infrequently as necessary to meet local needs

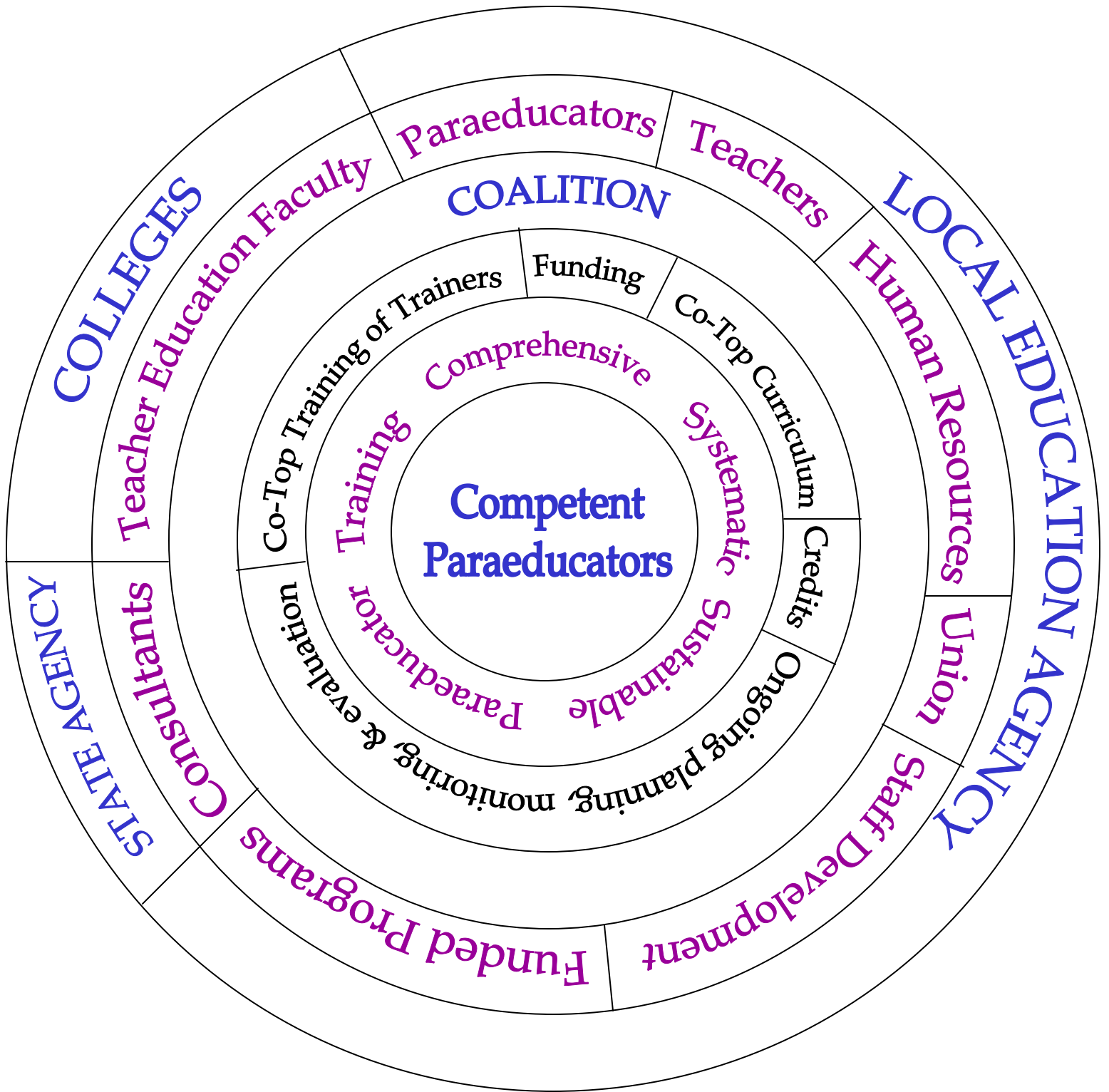
### *CO-TOP is systematic because it:*

- Is based on a coherent curriculum
- Includes a management system
- Provides easy verification of content integrity and depth
- Offers structure for delivering ongoing paraeducator training, training and support for trainers, coaching for paraeducators, and accountability
- Includes assessments of local needs

### *CO-TOP is sustainable because it:*

- Relies on internal resources
- Involves internal commitment and leadership
- Fosters strong local policy development
- Involves teachers and other school professionals
- Involves ongoing coaching, feedback, and evaluation of paraeducator performance and skills
- Involves on-going program monitoring, documentation and evaluation
- Provides a forum for exploring funding options
- Is accessible to all paraeducators
- Is affordable
- Articulates/transfers to two to four year degree college coursework

THE CO-TOP MODEL



# CO-TOP MODEL

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CO-TOP TRAINING?

Evidence collected by The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center suggests:

- Trained paraeducators perform more effectively
- Teachers have greater confidence in paraeducators' work
- Paraeducators report greater confidence in their own effectiveness with students
- Teachers have greater confidence in their ability to supervise paraeducators
- Administrators have greater confidence that students are being served by qualified personnel
- Paraeducator pay raises have been implemented in places where there is CO-TOP training – even though there is no requirement to do so
- Paraeducators stay in their positions longer – districts reduce turnover costs
- Teachers report improved team work
- Trainers stay longer in their positions and plan on remaining in educational careers
- Trainers attribute their interest in staying in education to the rewards and professional growth associated with training paraeducators

## WHAT DO PARAEDUCATORS SAY ABOUT CO-TOP ACADEMY INSTRUCTORS?

*“Thank you {instructors} for helping to improve us {paraeducators}!”*

*“Instructors were very welcoming, were well-organized, very responsive to questions and concerns we had.”*

*“The instructors were all excellent and empathetic to the Para’s role in school.”*

*“I love how our instructors taught class. They made it very interesting and enjoyable.”*

## WHAT DO PARAEDUCATORS SAY ABOUT THE CONTENT OF CO-TOP ACADEMIES?

*“I really appreciate all the extra work and effort put out for these classes; I always walk away empowered to assist my student (who I love) in a better way.”*

*“I always go home after class feeling confident knowing more than I started the day.”*

## WHAT DO TRAINERS SAY ABOUT PARAEDUCATORS WHO TAKE CO-TOP ACADEMIES?

“...The paraeducators want to devour everything... They’re not there because they have to be, they’re there because they want to be and they want to learn. It’s very personally gratifying to be able to give them what they need. I really enjoy doing it.”

“...It’s just exciting to see the paraeducators confidence build because then the students respect them more and they feel safer and they do better.”

“...They were so highly motivated to learn. How great their thirst was to learn more about the profession and about kids. They are the most highly motivated adults I know.”

“Seeing how motivated they are, this has also helped me respect them even more than I did in the past.”

“...After being in sped so long you think that every one knows what you know and it surprised me to find how little information and background they had.”

## WHAT DO TEACHERS BELIEVE THEIR ROLE AS CO-TOP TRAINERS HAS DONE FOR THEM?

“CO-TOP taught me to be a better advocate and a better supervisor for my paraeducator.”

“Training paraeducators has given me a new challenge and I think that I have become a better teacher. Going over information refreshes my knowledge and I feel that I am learning as I am teaching. It really reenergized me- there’s nothing like a new challenge.”

“It has been a very enjoyable experience for me and it also opens my eyes to being a more empathetic person...and helps me see the real world that others are working in.”

## WHAT DO ADMINISTRATORS SAY ABOUT CO-TOP?

“We overheard two paras saying, “It is just so wonderful to learn all of these things, I just want to keep learning and learning”... and I thought, isn’t that amazing. ... The whole idea of learning again has become fun... and kind of its own intrinsic reward for them... I thought it was very gratifying.”

“It’s not unusual for the paras to be hesitant to be engaged in (taking college classes), simply because it’s a class and that has its fears as well... But once they are engaged in that learning and see the benefit that it has just for them as a person involved with kids, then they start to develop their own momentum and their own energy to continue the training. ... They get their feet wet and get really motivated from the first class.”

“I would say that Paraeducators who get training in any area tend to stay longer than those who have a rough year and fly by the seat of their pants. Some of them get frustrated and leave.”

## STEPS TO MAKE CO-TOP WORK FOR YOU

### **Establish a Coalition**

Comprehensive, Systematic, and Sustainable paraeducator training cannot be one person’s responsibility. It requires the involvement of many individuals who hold responsibility for different aspects of education and who have a range of expertise and skills. Members of the Coalition each bring ideas about the purposes and outcomes as well as the resources and inputs to the group for mutual consideration. As with any collaborative work group, CO-TOP Coalition members recognize that their effectiveness hinges on:

- Sharing the vision that paraeducator training is necessary
- Sharing responsibilities and distributing the work involved
- Sharing accountability for the outcomes of the program
- Using a collaborative style in problem solving and decision-making
- Sharing resources
- Offering diverse expertise and perspectives
- Agreeing to assess outcomes and changing needs and to change tactics as the needs change.



### *Who Are CO-TOP Coalition Members?*

The CO-TOP Coalition consists of all those who have knowledge of paraeducator issues. The Coalition might include:

- School district funded programs administrators (e.g. special education, Title I, English Language Acquisition),
- Building administrators
- Central office administrators with responsibility for human resources and staff development
- Teachers
- Paraeducators
- Related services providers (e.g. physical therapists, nurses, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, school psychologists)
- Paraeducator union representatives
- Parents
- Representatives of other educational research or service agencies in the area (e.g. regional labs, research centers, educational resource centers)
- Faculty from community colleges, four year degree colleges and universities.
- Representatives of state offices or departments of education (e.g. consultants for funded programs, staff development, parent groups)

In short, for a Coalition to be effective, it needs to be heterogeneous: theorists and practitioners, those who plan and develop the services and those who deliver the services. Within a successful consortium all members and all points of view have equal value and status.

### **Identify a Coordinator**

The primary roles of the coordinator are:

- Primary contact person
- Meeting planner and facilitator
- Central communicator
- Representative of paraeducator training issues
- Funding manager

### *Who Could Take Lead?*

Leadership of the Coalition requires a position of some authority and authorization to take action on behalf of the group. Leadership may be shared and tasks may be delegated to others who have the skills and are given sufficient authority to carry them out. Typically a district coalition will be coordinated by a:

- Staff Development Director or Coordinator
- Special Education Director or Coordinator
- ESL / Bilingual Director or Coordinator
- Title Program Director
- Classified Training Coordinator
- Staff Development Director or Coordinator

Often, the training implementation tasks are shared by:

- CO-TOP trainers
- Teachers
- Paraeducators
- Secretary in Staff Development or Special Education

### **Funding**

Expenses may include:

- Substitute personnel to release professionals to be trained as CO-TOP trainers
- Purchase of training materials
- The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center Consulting fees
- Copies
- Trainer compensation
- Advertising and information dissemination costs
- Refreshments
- Tuition subsidies

### *What Are Potential Sources of Funding?*

Within a statewide or a district training effort, there are a variety of sources for funding that may be considered. Some potential funding sources at a statewide level are:

Part B funds allocated by special education divisions within state education agencies

Title I funds

English Language Acquisition division funds

Grant or foundation funds housed in institutions of higher education

Teacher development funds (Title II – formerly Eisenhower grant funds)

On a district level some possible departmental budgets that may include some training funds are:

- Human Resources
- Staff Development
- Special Education
- Curriculum and Instruction departments
- Title I, Title III and Title II programs
- Individual school budgets
- Teacher and paraeducator unions
- Private foundations
- Donations by local businesses and parents
- While each budget may have limited funding available, leveraging those funds can result in significant amounts of money

### **Develop a Cadre of Trainers**

A trained cadre of trainers becomes the district's most valuable asset in establishing a comprehensive, systematic, and sustainable paraeducator training program. The capacity of the Cadre of Trainers is built on principles of careful initial selection, sufficient and appropriate training, and ongoing support contribute over time.

#### *Identify Potential Trainers*

Paraeducators who take CO-TOP Academies tell us that the best trainers are those who know their content and convey it well. The most frequent comments from paraeducators about CO-TOP Trainers indicate that great trainers:

- *Have good background knowledge*
- *Have knowledge about many aspects of teaching*

## Train Trainers

### *Scheduling PSA and TOPA*

This step involves contacting The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center to find mutually convenient dates. Together, The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center and the Coalition schedule the training dates, times, and location – for the PSA and TOPA trainings. Generally, it's best to schedule PSA in two consecutive days and then to offer TOPA a few weeks later in two consecutive days.

### *Provide Graduate Credit for Trainers*

PSA and TOPA may be offered for graduate credit because the trainings meets the requirements of graduate level coursework, and the instructor from the PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center is graduate faculty at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center. With advance notice, The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center can arrange to offer graduate credit in your location, or you may establish graduate credit through a local university.

The advantage of college credit is that transcripts are universally accepted means for verifying preparation. Moreover, making graduate credit for PSA and TOPA establishes the Cadre of Trainers as a unique entity distinguished by a level of preparation not common to all teachers.

### *Obtain Release Time to Train Trainers*

The effort to train a cadre of trainers also depends on obtaining release time for the trainers to be trained. The PSA and TOPA trainings are best delivered on work days, while teachers are out of the school building and away from students.

### *Oversee Training Arrangements*

Arranging any training requires attention to detail. Room and seating arrangements, refreshments, agendas, handouts, books, and other training materials must be attended to in advance. The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center will provide originals for all handouts well in advance, but TOPA textbooks must be ordered from the publisher well ahead of time.

### *Maintain Training Database*

The district will want to keep track of information about trainers and paraeducator participants including numbers of participants, locations, pre and post test and course evaluation results.

## Establish College Credits for CO-TOP Courses

The No Child Left Behind Act requires that all paraeducators working in Title I programs have either 2 years of college credit, an AA degree, or that they pass a rigorous skills assessment. A similar standard is likely to be applied to special education paraeducators with the next reauthorization of IDEA. CO-TOP Academies enhance the skills of the paraeducators and can be offered for 1 undergraduate semester hour of credit each. A paraeducator may then transfer all the credits earned through CO-TOP to a community college program. Districts may want to negotiate an arrangement with a local community college at the outset.

On the other hand, if college credit will take time to negotiate you can still begin preparing trainers, and getting started with training. Keep good documentation about participants, their attendance, their completion of assignments, course evaluations and pre and post testing so that you can always go back and document the training you've provided.

## Train Paraeducators

To offer training to paraeducators the CO-TOP Coalition needs to:

- Make fiscal decisions regarding how to make the training attractive to attendees (e.g. stipends, tuition reimbursement, hourly pay, during school hours or other preferred time)
- Determine training needs of paraeducators
- Identify the trainer for each academy
- Decide and advertise dates, locations, academies
- Provide trainers with training materials
- Provide ongoing guidance/mentoring to paraeducators to help them successfully complete the CO-TOP curriculum and to transfer credits to degree programs

## Plan, Monitor and Evaluate

For comprehensive, systematic, and sustainable state or district wide paraeducator training, continuous planning, monitoring and evaluation are critical. Towards this end, the Coalition needs to:

- Hold frequent meetings and establish other channels of communication for frequent contact among members.
- Continuously assess paraeducator training needs, initiate discussions on pervasive problems and highlight solutions for paraeducator training and employment issues

- *Have experience in many settings...*
- *Know subject extremely well*
- *Present a wealth of knowledge in motivational and exciting ways*

Paraeducators also say that the best trainers relate well to them. Paraeducators say that great trainers:

- *Are friendly*
- *Are very real people - down to earth*
- *Make it comfortable to ask questions and participate,*
- *Validate and apply participant's ideas,*
- *Open to discussions - open to questions*
- *Good listeners*
- *Respond with great answers*
- *Caring people*

Paraeducators also note that great trainers have lots of energy for teaching CO-TOP classes. They mention:

- *Enthusiasm for teaching adults and the subject*
- *Energy*
- *Humor*
- *Excitement*
- *Animation*

So, try to identify school professionals who:

- **Are interested and motivated to teach paraeducators**
- **Have substantial knowledge in their field**
- **Have reputations as master teachers**
- **Have demonstrated leadership skills**
- **Are respected and credible**
- **Have previous experience teaching adults**
- **Believe in the power of professional development**
- **Show professional commitment**
- **Are ready for a new challenge**

- Persist in efforts for continuous funding
- Assure high quality curriculum by:
  - ⇒ Keeping abreast with any revisions of the CO-TOP curriculum by maintaining contact with the PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center
  - ⇒ Distributing updated of curriculum
  - ⇒ Gathering feedback from the trainers on curriculum and communicate it to the PAR<sup>2</sup>A center
- Monitor and ensure quality of training provided by the CO-TOP trainers (scrutinize data gathered through pre and post skills assessments and course evaluation forms, analyze patterns)
- Provide on going support to trainers

### Provide Ongoing Support to Trainers

The PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center offers an online course called the TOPCAT Seminar for CO-TOP trainers. The purpose is to provide CO-TOP Trainers (school professionals who have been through the PSA: EDUC 5010 and TOPA: EDUC 5020) ongoing support in their roles as supervisors and trainers of paraeducators. Through this seminar, trainers receive updated information about CO-TOP Academies, find collegial support from other trainers, exchange ideas, gain presenting and adult teaching ideas, and receive feedback on their teaching of paraeducator academies. This seminar also addresses the questions and needs of the individual CO-TOP trainer with regards to CO-TOP paraeducator training materials and processes. The seminar is available for graduate credit and includes readings, email exchanges, and reflections on their work as CO-TOP trainers. It is open to all CO-TOP trainers in and outside Colorado.

Within a district, trainer quality can be maintained by:

- Providing meeting times for trainers where they network with other trainers, exchange ideas and share information
- Observing training sessions and providing coaching to trainers as warranted
- Providing feedback on their teaching
- Reviewing procedures and routine aspects of project management

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