

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION:

The Role of Attendants & Special Education Technicians on School Teams

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SUPPORT STAFF ARE PART OF THE SCHOOL TEAM

Special education technicians and attendants are part of the pedagogical team in the school, working towards student success. They play key supportive roles, collaborating with teachers to help students with special needs reach individual success. Teachers are responsible for program, evaluation, reporting to and communicating with parents, and behaviour management. In order for students to experience optimal success when they receive extra support in the classroom, teachers and support staff must work closely together as partners in the delivery of their educational program. Regular school team collaboration on interventions and strategies result in opportunities for individual learning and social growth for the most vulnerable of our students: those with special needs.

Attendants and special education technicians work as partners in the classroom, providing specific supports to identified or targeted students with special needs. Attendants support students who have physical and significant developmental needs, who require a high level of individual support and/or physical monitoring to function in the classroom. Special education technicians support students with a broader range of learning and behavioral needs, and play a more in-depth role in curriculum adaptation and modification, planning and implementing behaviour interventions, working with small groups, carrying out crisis intervention in keeping with a school plan, and actively collaborating with other staff across the school.

While the school administrator is the supervisor of all support staff assigned to the school, classroom and resource teachers play a daily role in guiding the strategies and needed interventions of other adults providing support in classrooms. This is accomplished through ongoing communication and a team approach, as well as clarity of roles and responsibilities. A team approach is necessary to develop and implement interventions, adaptations, and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Observations and input from both attendants and special education technicians should be part of the planning process in setting up strategies and interventions.

THE ROLE OF ATTENDANTS

Attendants work closely with students with physical needs, such as those who have a visual impairment or who use a wheelchair. They also work with students with significant developmental delays, such as young children with autism or those with global delays and limited personal autonomy. They provide close physical supervision and need to provide ongoing individual prompting, monitoring, and assistance with engagement in classroom activities. They support safe behaviours, emerging social development, and basic communication. They may work either in regular classrooms, Learning Centres, or at times designated spots within the school set up by the school team for individual student needs.¹

¹ Classification Plan For Support Staff Positions CPNCA
Attendant for Handicapped Students 1.2.10

THE ROLE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNICIANS

The principal and customary work of an employee in this class of employment consists in working with a multidisciplinary team to apply special education techniques and methods in keeping with an individualized education plan.

Under the responsibility of the school administration and in conjunction with the multidisciplinary team, he or she participates in developing and drawing up an individualized education plan; selects the measures designed to attain the objectives determined, develops his or her action plan and applies the measures; assesses whether the objectives were attained and participates in evaluating the plan.²

Special education technicians work with both individual students and groups of students, and play a broader role in the adaptation/modification of curriculum, providing learning assistance and exam support, and in the delivery of behaviour support. They carry out crisis intervention in keeping with a school plan. They also develop special materials, such as visuals, behaviour charts, organizational supports, etc. They work proactively with small groups on social skills, anger management, learning activities, etc. They may work in either regular classrooms, Learning Centres, special intervention rooms, or across several locations in a school.

Special education technicians may have a role to play in collaborating with attendants: coordinating interventions, coaching and training, or providing special learning materials such as visual supports, social stories, etc. and supporting the implementation of strategies and behaviour interventions. They may also provide support to new or less experienced technicians.

SCHOOL TEAMS AND COLLABORATION

Clarity of roles and specific responsibilities of all members of the school team are important to effective collaboration. While a teacher's ultimate responsibility for all students in the class is clear, a sense of shared responsibility for the students in the school community among teachers, support staff, professionals and other school personnel leads to effective partnering and support delivery for students with special needs. While attendants and technicians in their distinct roles provide critical support to many children with diverse learning, social, and developmental needs, *everyone's role* on the school team includes facilitating autonomous learning, promoting individual success, and recognizing the role of peers in a student's learning and personal development.

To help clarify the difference in attendant and special education technician roles, examples of differentiated tasks are provided in Table #1,

² Classification Plan For Support Staff Positions CPNCA
Special Education Technician 1.1.11

Table #1

Examples of Tasks for Each Role

<i>ATTENDANTS</i>	<i>SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNICIANS</i>
<p>May provide: physical assistance with toileting; mobility; feeding; personal hygiene; staying within physical boundaries</p> <p>May provide behavior monitoring and intervention in keeping with the team plan for students with autonomy limitations or significant developmental delays: e.g. bolting, throwing objects, melt-downs, screaming, sexual boundaries, aggression, defiance, etc.</p> <p>May monitor and accompany students for transitions, cool down periods, individual time blocks as needed, use of separate individual materials, etc. in keeping with the team plan</p> <p>May encourage attention and task engagement through verbal, physical, and gestural prompting, feedback, praise, use of re-inforcers, etc. To avoid earned helplessness of students with high needs and to promote belonging and student autonomy, may provide incidental help to other students</p> <p>May facilitate participation and learning through individual prompting and cueing (verbal, physical, and gestural cueing towards visuals), providing ongoing feedback and reinforcement, modeling, etc.</p> <p>May help students use the provided visuals, social stories, charts or schedules, manipulatives, adapted/modified learning activities, or other special materials, as determined in the team plan</p> <p>May encourage and facilitate peer interactions through prompting, redirection to peers, avoidance of hovering, etc. on an individual basis or in small groups</p> <p>May work with a targeted student with a peer buddy or monitor student within a small group of peers during an activity to encourage individual social growth and capitalize on peer models</p> <p>As part of the school team, may record observations, carry out daily routine, home-school communications under the direction of the teacher(s), share input on the student's progress with the school team</p>	<p>May administer medication (in keeping with the ETSB policy), monitor and record medication as part of a team plan</p> <p>May develop and implement behavior interventions or help carry out school-wide crisis interventions for students with psycho-social or developmental delays in keeping with the team plan: e.g. defiance, aggression, bolting, substance abuse, bullying, throwing objects, melt-downs, screaming, inappropriate sexual boundaries, etc. May collaborate with attendants on behavior interventions.</p> <p>Same as attendant plus: may develop and implement transition strategies for students, develop or organize individual or alternate schedule or activities, select or make individual materials (e.g. Boardmaker), coach students for re-integration in keeping with the team plan, etc.</p> <p>Same as attendant plus: may provide learning assistance to students in the classroom as needed, in a small group, or to individuals (see suggestion charts)</p> <p>Same as attendant plus: may provide support to several individuals, small groups, set up strategic interventions for attendants, may work in several different classrooms</p> <p>Same as attendant plus: in collaboration with teachers, may develop and implement adapted/modified learning activities, make visual supports, create social stories, charts and schedules for individuals and/or groups of students, etc.</p> <p>Same as attendant plus: may facilitate small groups Around learning activities, social skill development, Anger management, peer mediation, anti-bullying, etc.</p> <p>May develop social skill support materials, coach attendants on facilitating peer interactions and small group animation, work as part of the school team monitoring and supporting pro-social development, etc.</p> <p>Same as attendant plus: as part of the school team may develop, implement and discuss behavior charting or student tracking systems, recording of systematic observations, home-school communication tools, etc.</p>

THINKING ON YOUR FEET

In any school or classroom, there are unexpected events, changes in plans, and short periods of time when all students are occupied without the need for direct assistance from the support staff present in the room. While attendants and special education technicians have expected tasks and interventions, there will also be times when support staff and teachers may find ways to work collaboratively and flexibly, and respond on the spot in order for resources to be optimized and for support staff to feel fully engaged and valued as members of the school team. Tables# 2 and #3 provide some suggestions on how support staff can work within classrooms to support students and teachers and avoid hovering over individual students.

Table #2

Collaborative Strategies for Teachers and Special Education Technicians

If the Teacher is Doing This	A Special Education Technician Can Be Doing This
Lecturing	Model note taking on smartboard, draw ideas on whiteboard, provide graphic organizers, modify follow-up worksheets, etc.
Taking attendance	Collect and organize homework
Giving directions	Write the directions on board as a visual support , summarize key steps on post-its, highlight key words on worksheets, make a checklist for students, after teacher is finished do listening checks or repeat directions with scaled down language
Providing large group instruction	Collect data/observations on student behaviour, adapt materials for an upcoming activity, circulate silently to provide gestural prompts and monitor student use of materials
Giving a test	Read or scribe the test for targeted students, supervise small group who need a quiet space or extended time
Facilitating stations or small groups	Also facilitate stations or small groups
Sustained silent reading	Read aloud quietly with a small group
Helping students with individual writing or correction of work at central station	Circulate and provide ongoing assistance to struggling students with their work, prompt the student with special needs to also go for teacher conference time, collaborate so technician and teacher have two conference/correcting stations
Teacher is monitoring class and all students are working independently and quietly	Use a few minutes of quiet class time, or other available prep period, to collaborate with teacher on student previewing of upcoming material

Table #3
How Attendants Can Play a Natural, Class-Wide Role While Monitoring and Assisting Targeted Students

If the Student is Doing This	An Attendant Can Be Doing This
Student can do a short task independently	Monitor from a distance while circulating and providing quick, incidental help to others in the class
Student is sitting in a large group, listening to teacher reading or talking	Avoid sitting in the student group on floor and organize student materials at a near-by table, back away from a student's desk unless help is needed, work out a signal with teacher on when to intervene or remove student so initial redirection comes from teacher
Student is part of a small group playing a game or doing group activity	Act as an adult coach in the group, comment on the game/activity to all group members, prompt peers on how to include or help the targeted student, avoid giving adult cues to only one student
Young student is getting dressed for recess	Allow student extra time to get dressed and provide only partial help (e.g. insert zipper but student must pull up). Mingle with all children in corridor, and act as a supervising adult for "zipper and snow pants" assistance
Student has trouble organizing materials or following class routines	Rather than bombarding with individual verbal prompts, cue the child to visual schedules if provided, embed verbal prompts to a targeted student in prompts to other near-by students who seem lost, work out with teacher if student can have a peer helper or simplified routines
Student is waiting to see teacher or hand in work	Monitor student but circulate and attend to others who are finishing up or getting organized
Peers tattle on student with special needs, e.g. using bad words or taking materials	Sensitize and coach peers on how to respond to student's behavior, engage peers in supporting "friendly reminders", consult with teacher about having a class sensitization activity

HOW THE SCHOOL TEAM CAN AVOID LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

There is much research on the impediments of constant one-to-one help in the classroom from support staff for students with special needs (Reference: Michael Giangreco). Drawbacks include diminished teacher instruction, interference with and decrease in peer interactions, and increased dependency on adults, to name only a few. At the same time, a number of students with high needs require ongoing and frequent individual assistance due to physical needs or significant developmental delays. How can a school team avoid the learned helplessness and increased behavior problems which come with too much hovering and shadowing in one-to-one support situations, yet provide effective individualized support?

It is helpful to remember the long-term goal of helping each student become an independent learner and interdependent member of the community. Providing optimal individual support involves ongoing teamwork between teacher and attendant in the classroom, balancing individual adult help with monitoring from a distance, and facilitating students' interactions with peers. A student's day should not consist of constant one-to-one adult "tutoring" or prompting,

an adult velcroed to the student's side in the classroom, or the absence of the teacher as the lead pedagogue in the student's daily learning. Table #4 provides some examples of how attendants and technicians can avoid the problems of learned helplessness and some of the acting-out or attention-seeking behaviors which can develop when providing extensive one-to-one help.

Table #4

How Support Staff Can Avoid Pitfalls Associated with One-to-One Support

If the Student is Doing This	An Attendant/Technician Can Be Doing This
Student seeks constant attention from attendant	Ensure that individual help is provided intermittently and only as needed: avoid constant sitting beside the child, encourage the child to ask the teacher or a peer for help when appropriate, act as a general helping hand in the class whenever possible and interact naturally with all students so child does not become possessive, stand or sit behind a student when helping so he focuses on the work task , provide intensive help in short bouts
Student clings to attendant	Refrain from lap sitting, hand holding (unless needed for safety in transitions), and hugging. Physically move away from student whenever possible and monitor from a distance. Direct targeted student to check directions or show work to the teacher
Student does not orient to peers or seek peer interactions	Encourage child to initiate interaction with a peer by providing a script: Can I play too? May I borrow your glue? Where does this go? Work out with teacher how child can distribute class materials, show something or re-read to several peers while you monitor. Be careful about inhibiting interaction opportunities by too much adult hovering.
Student does not know how to do a paper and pencil task and needs adult help	Encourage student to check with peer, discuss with team the value of imperfect but independently completed work over adult assisted perfection, provide help and then fade: begin task with student, prompt the student to do a step or two and walk away to help others, return to help after a few steps are done by student
Student waits for adult help, won't initiate work task without adult prompting	Increase wait time to 5-10 seconds after giving a verbal prompt, indicate you'll help after student completes initial step, set out materials or highlight starting point on a paper and back away, praise efforts for starting
Student balks at work or resists task	Ignore non-compliance and make encouraging comments, distract through novelty by posing a question, making amusing comments or offering a choice of writing tools, comment on what peers are doing
Not following simple teacher directives, e.g. a direction to line up	Signal the student to stop and listen to teacher. Provide indirect cues: comment positively on 1 or 2 peers who are lining up, ask the student who they would like to stand behind, lead a young child by the hand silently to the line then comment on how he followed the teacher direction, signal to the teacher to repeat the direction individually

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

Teachers are responsible for evaluating, reporting, and communicating with parents on a student's progress. Many students with special needs use a home-school communication book or have daily notes in the agenda about routine events. These regular home-school communications are important to parents of children who have limited language skills and can't share what happened at school, tell how they feel, or explain some special event. Parents of students with special needs rely on these individual messages for basic information on their child's day. It is often an attendant or special education technician who carries out this ongoing exchange with parents, providing an important link to the classroom for the family.

It is important to keep in mind the main objective of this informal, daily exchange with parents: supporting a student with limited language skills. It's advisable to avoid open-ended commentaries, reporting on behavior, or discussing important issues which should be directed to and addressed by teachers. Reporting on behavior, using a behavior chart, or making detailed progress comments on specific goals should only be carried out as part of a team plan, using an agreed upon format. This team approach sets up objective and professional communication with a strategic goal, and avoids potentially awkward situations for support staff or inappropriate expectations or negative reactions from parents. It also clarifies the teacher's role as lead pedagogue and helps attendants and technicians maintain a professional distance in situations where they may be viewed by anxious parents as the prime educator in their child's day.

The goal is to support the student, the parents and the teacher through your efforts to enhance communication and the home-school connection. The following suggestions help establish appropriate boundaries for home-school communication by support staff and can enhance the connection between home and school:

- The school team should collaborate on how home-school communication will be carried out and by whom: e.g. notes in agenda, individual booklet for daily routine communication, or, in keeping with a team plan, a system or checklist for recording behaviors or progress on specific goals
- Keep the format short and simple: use pre-formatted booklets or pages with simple headings for routine home-school communication
- Be careful of confidentiality, and avoid referring to other students.
- Teachers should periodically read and write comments in daily home-school communication books. It can be helpful for teachers to initial an agenda or booklet daily or on a regular basis
- Rather than rushing in the last busy 10 minutes to jot down a few words, try to write comments or complete charts throughout the day
- Use the book as a language development tool: encourage parents to use the book as a prompt to ask the child to retell something significant or positive about their day. Ask the speech therapist for suggestions on how to use a home-school book to prompt "talking"
- Balance the principle of maintaining professional distance with recording specifics about the student's activities, providing lead questions for language prompting, and inviting news from home. Keep this balance for face-to-face encounters on the playground or at the classroom door as well

- Support staff should bring parent comments or questions, other than simple inquiries about routines, to a teacher's attention for the team to discuss. Complaints should immediately be shown to a teacher or administrator
- When there are concerns about home-school communications, photocopy and date the pages to ensure accurate record keeping for future reference

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

Attendants, special education technicians, teachers, professionals and administrators are partners in the education of students with special needs. Support in the classroom from attendants and special education technicians is highly valued by teachers and recognized as one of the keys to individual success for students facing challenges in their learning and social development.

Working as a team is the most effective way to provide a student with a *balanced day* of individual help and opportunities for independent engagement in learning and social activities. Making a difference in a student's school experience is best accomplished by becoming part of a learning community, both as an educator in a support role and as a life-long learner.