



# LEADING WELL UNDER PRESSURE

**2026 MASE Fall Leadership Conference**

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## **Paraprofessional Support-Considerations in the Least Restrictive Environment**

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# Introduction

Paraprofessionals play an essential role in supporting students with disabilities, helping them access instruction, develop independence, and participate meaningfully in the general education setting.



## Gathering Input

**Question:** How does para support help students in the classroom?

[Menti Answer Link](#)



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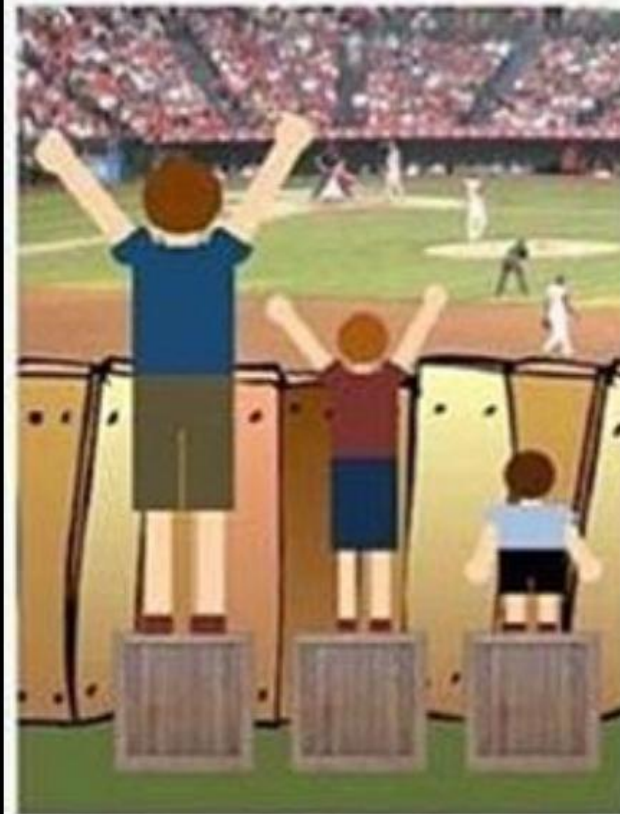
# Agenda

- Accommodations vs. Modifications
- Least Restrictive Environment
- Velcro Problem
- Paraprofessional Impacts
- Purposeful Support
- Moving Forward

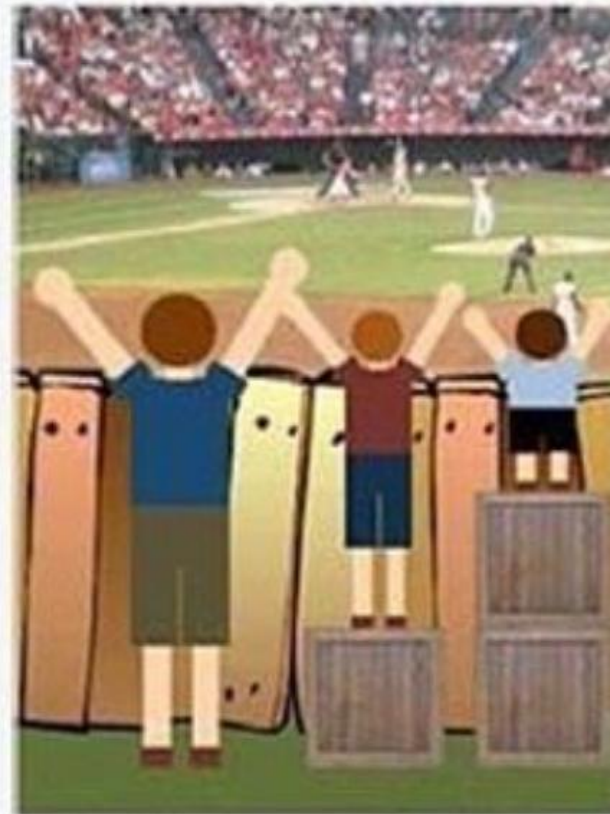


# ACCOMMODATIONS VS. MODIFICATIONS

### EQUALITY VERSUS EQUITY



In the first image, it is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports. They are being treated equally.



In the second image, individuals are given different supports to make it possible for them to have equal access to the game. They are being treated equitably.



In the third image, all three can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed.



# Accommodations

- Accommodations level the playing field so a child with a disability can access the regular grade-level curriculum. They do not change what the student is required to master.
  - Key feature: Same grading scale and learning standards.
  - Examples: Extra time on tests, listening to an audiobook instead of reading print, preferential seating, or taking a test in a quiet room.
- Impact on diploma: Does not affect graduation requirements or the ability to earn a standard high school diploma.



# Modifications

- Change the actual target. They alter the depth, complexity, or amount of core content a student must learn, meaning the student is no longer held to the exact same grade-level standards as peers.
  - Key feature: Reduced or altered learning expectations.
  - Examples: Writing a one-paragraph essay instead of a five-paragraph essay, answering fewer or simpler test questions, or grading on alternative criteria.
- Impact on diploma: May affect a student's path toward a standard high school diploma and typically ties closely to alternate achievement goals.



# Paraprofessional Roles

- A para can support accommodations or modifications, BUT if in there to help support accommodations, this should not require a lot of extra help on work.
- A para supporting a modification will likely be more involved in the work expectations.



## LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

### Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

"The least restrictive environment is the one that, to the greatest extent possible, satisfactorily educates disabled children together with children who are not disabled, in the same school the disabled child would attend if the child were not disabled."

Reference: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/idea.lre.fape.htm>

**Most Restrictive**

Educated in a hospital or home environment

Educated in a separate school for children with special needs

Full-Day in Special Education Classes with Mainstreaming Opportunities in other classes as specified in the IEP. Other related services (Speech, OT, PT) as needed

General Education class with Special Education part of the day. Other related services (Speech, OT, PT) as needed

General Ed placement with pull-out Special Education Services and other related services (Speech, OT, PT) if needed

General Education Services within the class, Special Education Consultant, related services (Speech, OT, PT) if needed

General Education Services with no Special Education supports or direct service

**Least Restrictive**

"Climb up the ladder one rung at a time!"



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# Meaning

- Legal requirement under federal law (IDEA) stating that students with disabilities must be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.
- Individual decision made by a student's IEP team
- Schools must first look at the regular classroom with needed supports before considering separate settings. (1, 2, 3, 4)

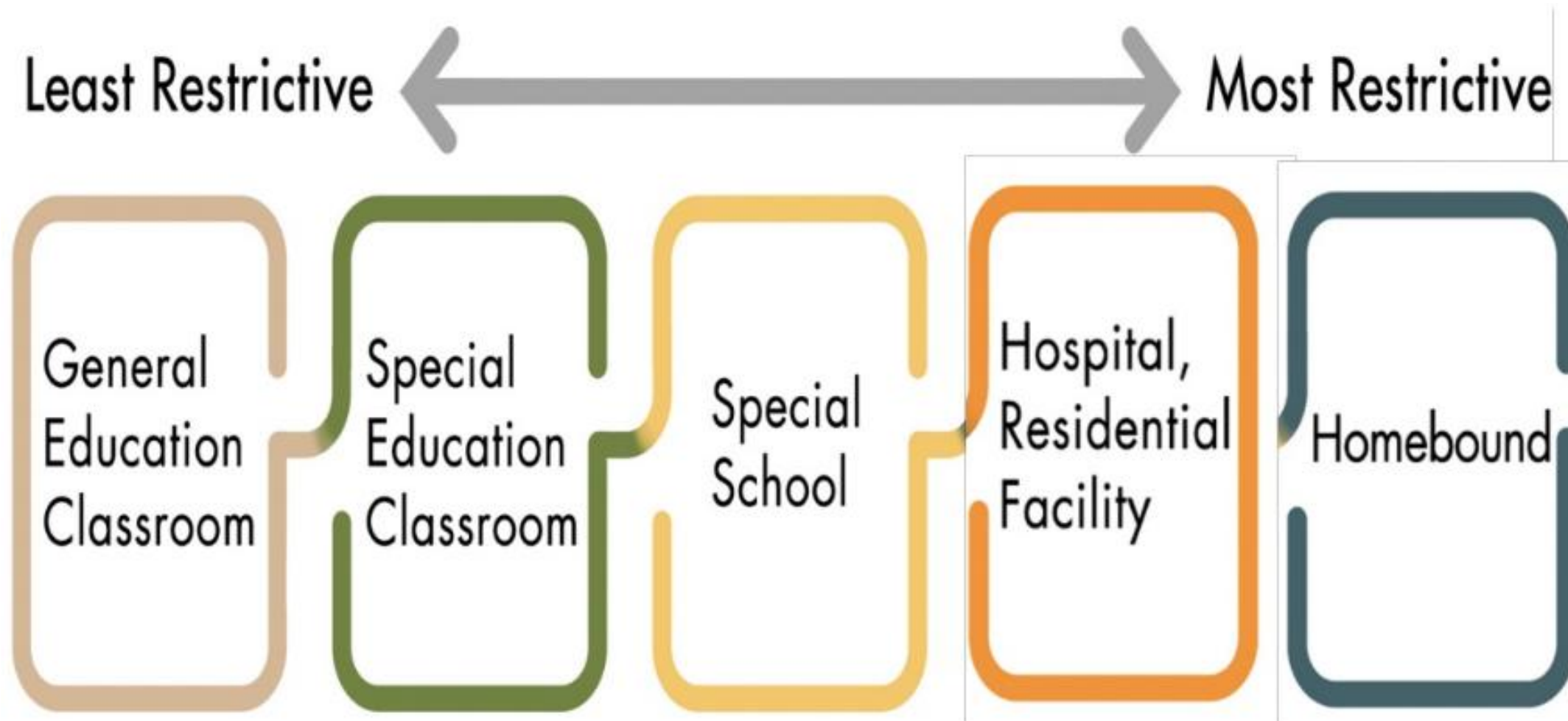


# Considerations

- It is not a location, or guarantee to be in any one setting
- Ensures students have access to general education peers and environments that are appropriate
- Sometimes, that access is limited to impacts of disability (i.e. Setting IV)
- LRE should be individualized
- Full inclusion is not always a student's LRE



# Continuum





# Paraprofessional Role in LRE

- A paraprofessional is a supplementary aid or service, not a placement or environment.
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is determined by access to general education content, curriculum, and peers — not by whether a student has adult support.



## Turn & Talk

Think about the most treasured child(ren) in your life.  
What are your hopes for their lives?





# VELCRO PROBLEM





# Scenario

- Student takes his seat with paraprofessional right behind him
- Paraprofessional follows him throughout the day, including lunch and recess
- Student glances to paraprofessional for approval whenever another adult interacts

Discuss – positives and negatives?



# What Research Shows

- Friendships stall
- Teacher-student bond weakens
- Students lose access to instruction from certified teacher
- Independence is eroded



# PARAPROFESSIONAL IMPACTS





# Effective Support

- Improves access to instruction
- Increases participation with peers
- Builds confidence
- Promotes independence
- Prepares students for life beyond school



## When LRE is Compromised

- Instruction is mostly with paraprofessional
- Peer interaction decreases
- Student doesn't know how to be in a classroom without support
- Dependence is created



# Think of Defense



|              | BASKETBALL                                        | PARAPROFESSIONAL SUPPORT                                                |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MAN-TO-MAN   | Each player guards a single opponent              | “One-on-one” para is assigned to shadow a student                       |
| ZONE DEFENSE | Defenders cover a whole area and shift, as needed | Room is scanned and support provided, as needed. Support flows fluidly. |





# Signs of a Successful Zone

- An outside observer can't tell who the paraprofessional is assigned to
- Student with assigned support is able to access other adults in the room for problem solving



# PURPOSEFUL SUPPORT





# What We Know

- Paraprofessionals are an integral part of our day-to-day
- Each child's need is different
- Positive impact rarely looks like an adult with a student to direct his/her every move, but that CAN be true
- We want students to want support to fade - sign of independence



## Not Paraprofessional Roles

- Creating lesson plans or instructional activities for initial instruction
- Accommodating work from the classroom
- Parent Communication - should all go through a teacher, or if a concern regarding school practices, should be directed to supervisor



## Common Questions

**“My student/child needs the paraprofessional because he/she would not be able to do the work without the help in the room.”**

- *Counter question* – If so, is that least restrictive? Should this child be in a different setting during this time, or is he/she able to advocate to leave for work time? Or, are we not modifying appropriately?



## Common Questions

**“My student/child needs to be in the room to learn from other general education students.”**

- *Counter question* – While this is what LRE is based on, if a student is only accessing a paraprofessional and not engaged with peers during this time, how is he/she learning anything from peers?



## Common Questions

**“So if a student can’t do anything independently, a general education class isn’t appropriate?”**

- *Counter* – Not necessarily. It is individualized, so if a student is gaining skills necessary for his/her goals in the IEP (i.e. bringing a pencil, working in a group, etc.), then this can be appropriate. This goal just need to be clear, and likely, grading accommodations outlined.



## MOVING FORWARD/THINGS TO TAKE AWAY





## This Does NOT Mean...

- Paraprofessionals are not needed
- Students can't build independence with paraprofessional support in the classroom



# Administrator Roles

- Ensure paraprofessionals are trained properly on fading supports and building independence.
- Spread awareness of impacts paraprofessional supports to all stakeholders.



# Para Training Essentials

- Paraprofessionals know their importance and have open communication with teachers and admin to express ideas and concerns.
- Understanding how to help students complete work independently.
- Understanding how to support peer relationships by prompting their student, and engaging appropriately with peers.



# General Education Teacher Roles

- Continue to engage in conversations about what LRE means and advocate for students based on your knowledge of them.
- Don't underestimate your engagement with student's during instruction, even when a para is present.
- General education input on student's needs for skill development is so valuable on an IEP team!

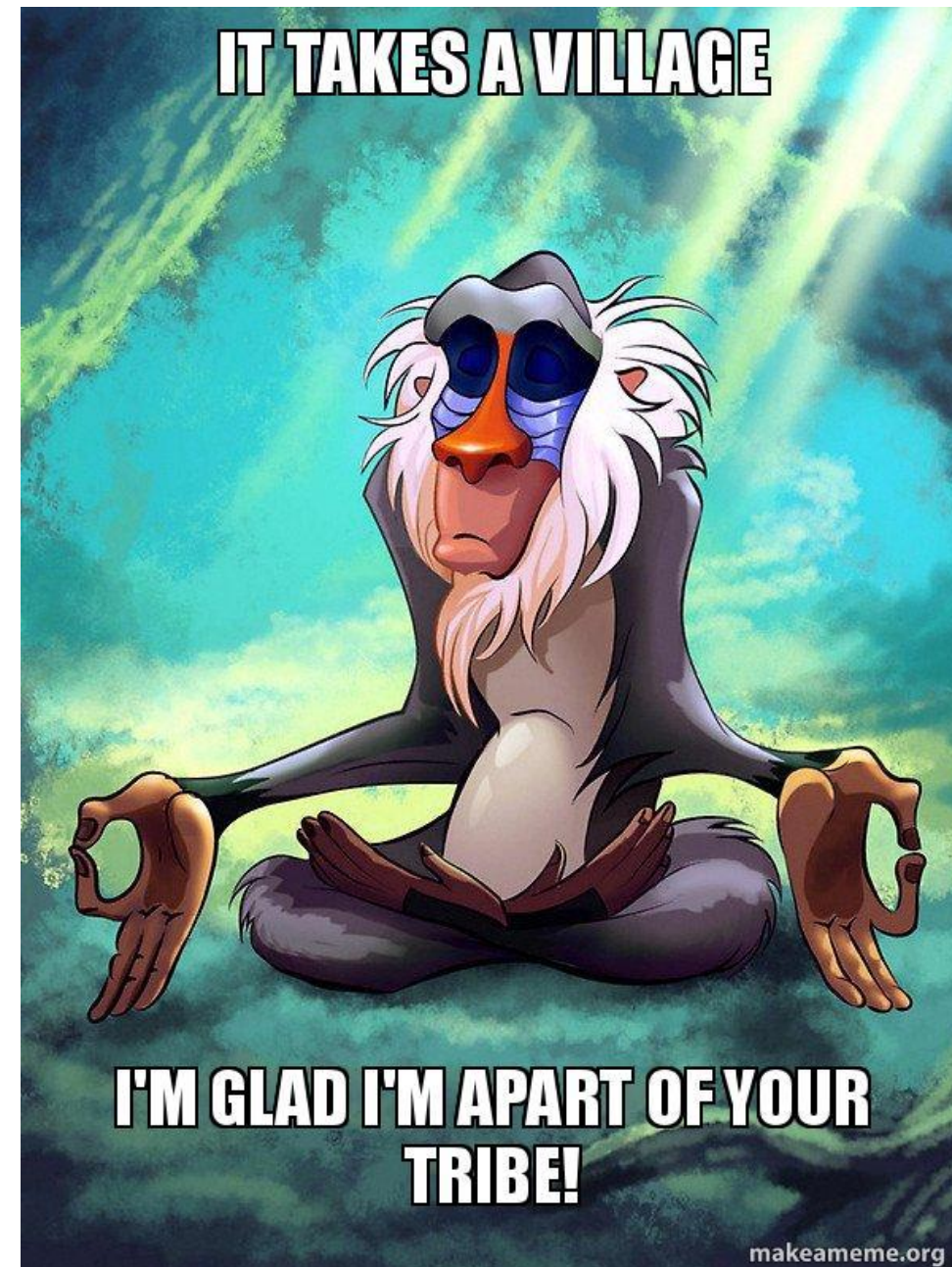


# Special Education Teacher Roles

- Help guide the team in accurately identifying what paraprofessional support looks like for each individual student.
- Advocate for paraprofessional training needs.



THE VILLAGE IS IMPORTANT!





# Challenges Moving Forward

- 1) Use “shared support” rather than “one-to-one” in conversations with parents
- 2) Consider alternate supports before adding para support when a student initially qualifies.



## 2026 MASE FALL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

“A World Without Teachers” - [LINK](#)





Remember....

***Belonging is an important part of anyone's self-worth  
at home, work or school.***

A strong sense of belonging profoundly impacts human health, shaping mental well-being, physical vitality, and overall success. It lowers anxiety, boosts confidence, and improves performance at school and work.



# References

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