The Pros and Cons of Individual Paraprofessionals or Teacher Aides

Years ago, teacher aides were often supporting teachers and students within self-contained classroom settings. With the switch to a more Inclusive Educational setting, teacher aides became more and more visible in general education classes supporting individual students in a 1:1 capacity. Some parents understandably request individual aide support (1:1) for their child because of their concerns or fears about how their child will be accepted, treated, supported, and instructed in general education classes. Under the direction of qualified professionals, trained teacher aides can serve a variety of valued roles within our schools and classrooms. These roles can include:

- Doing clerical tasks that free teachers to spend more time instructing students.
- Engaging in follow-up instruction, tutoring, or homework help.
- Providing supervision in group settings (e.g. cafeteria, playground, bus boarding).
- Assisting students with personal care needs (e.g. bathroom use, eating and dressing).
- Facilitating social skills, peer interactions, and positive behavior support plans.

It is important to evaluate a student’s needs and look at the pros and cons of an aide, especially if it is 1:1, to facilitate the discussion of whether this support is necessary for a particular student. Having an adult by a student’s side for all or part of the day can actually interfere with a student’s inclusion as a participating member of the classroom community. Excessive or unnecessary aide proximity can inadvertently cause the following:

- Separation from Classmates
- Unnecessary Dependence
- Interference with Peer Interactions
- Insular Relationship
- Feeling Stigmatized
- Limited Access to Competent Instruction
- Interference with Teacher Engagement
• Loss of Personal Control
• May Provoke Problem Behaviors

Teacher aides will always have a place in the classroom supporting students with special needs. We, the adults, need to first look at more natural supports to help our student's. When a team, which includes the parents, feel the support of an aide is necessary to the success of the student we then need to constantly evaluate and come up with a plan to teach the student the skills they will need to function more independently in school and eventually as an adult.