

Teachers

**Educational
Assistants**

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



The
Manitoba
Teachers'
Society

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Definitions: What is an Educational Assistant?.....	2
Why Use Educational Assistants' Help.....	3
MTS Policy: Guidelines for Educational Assistants.....	4
MTS Policy: Guidelines for Teacher Shortages.....	5
Regulation.....	6
Education Administration Act.....	7
First Things First: Preparing for Success.....	8
Getting It Done: Suggested Activities.....	9
Duties of Teachers and Teachers' Assistants: A Summary.....	11
Code of Professional Practice.....	13
Know the Limits: Prohibited Activities.....	14
What to do about Prohibited Activity.....	15
Dealing with Inappropriate Behavior.....	15
Some Real-Life Scenarios.....	16
For More Information.....	20
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Published by The Manitoba Teachers' Society, 191 Harcourt Street,
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Published: October 2004

Amended: May 2010

Introduction

Educational Assistants make a valuable contribution to classrooms in Manitoba. In the last few years roles have changed somewhat.

This booklet is intended to assist teachers in their work with the Educational Assistants who may be working in their classrooms and schools.

It begins with a brief introduction to classroom support personnel and the part they play in providing a supportive and enabling environment in public education situations.

A clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities should make the relationship harmonious and productive.

Definitions:

What is an Educational Assistant?

In Manitoba public schools, educational assistants may provide educational support as volunteers, library assistants, supervisory aides, school secretaries, clerical aides, lunch aides, attendants and markers.

Some terms which you may recognize are:

- **Teacher assistants;** assigned to work with a teacher, principal or a small team of teachers.
- **School aides;** perform a large variety of tasks for the entire teaching staff.
- **Volunteers;** occasional teacher aides or school aides who offer their services without pay.

Why Use Educational Assistants' Help?

Principals and teachers employ educational assistants to provide enrichment, help and support in their day-to-day activities in the schools.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society believes teachers, with their specialized training, experience and knowledge of children, are best qualified to teach public school students and instill in them a love for learning.

Teachers are often the most influential people in a child's life, outside of the home. But there is a larger world for children beyond the classroom. Many adults make valuable contributions to children's lives. Educational assistants, with guidance and supervision from teachers, can play a key role in bringing the wealth of experiences of life beyond school into the classroom to enrich the lives of students.

While educational assistants can help broaden children's experiences, there is no such thing as a definitive list of educational assistants' duties and responsibilities. Ultimately, teachers decide how best to work with educational assistants. Because they make those decisions, teachers have a professional responsibility to operate within the limits set forth in Manitoba's Public Schools Act and the policy of The Manitoba Teachers' Society.

*MTS Policy***Guidelines for Educational Assistants****Guidelines for Use of Educational Assistants**

- a. The function of educational assistants is to assist teachers.
- b. Persons hired as educational assistants shall, at all times, be assigned only those functions which are appropriate for educational assistants.
- c. The teaching staff shall at all times supervise persons employed as educational assistants.
- d. Teachers who are not school principals shall not participate in the written evaluation of educational assistants.
- e. Educational assistants shall not perform teaching tasks. Teaching tasks include such functions as planning, diagnosing, prescribing, instructing, evaluating and selecting learning resources to meet pupils' needs, and communicating with parents/guardians.
- f. Teachers shall be involved in the selection of educational assistants.
- g. The scheduling of EAs shall be the responsibility of the principal.
- h. No teacher shall be required to use the services of an educational assistant.
- i. If a teacher has concerns about a specific assignment, a meeting between the teacher and the principal involved shall be arranged to discuss and resolve the matter.
- j. Educational assistants shall not be replacements for certified teachers.
- k. Educational assistants shall not be time-tabled for supervision responsibilities in classroom environments including libraries, excluding noon-hour supervision.
- l. Educational assistants shall not be assigned to supervision responsibilities on student field trips without the presence of a supervising teacher.

(Revised 2008) Source: MTS Policy: Welfare Policy Workplace Issues IX.D

MTS Policy

Guidelines for Teacher Shortages

That in the event of teacher shortages:

1. There shall be no lowering of teacher education standards and certification requirements.
2. Professional duties normally carried out by teachers shall not be performed by educational assistants, volunteers or other uncertified personnel.
3. Class sizes shall not be increased.
4. Teachers not be required to cover absent teachers' classes.

(Revised 2004) Source: MTS Policy: Welfare Policy Workplace Issues IX.G

Regulation

The Education Administration Act (C.C.S.M. c. E10) Persons Having Care and Charge of Pupils Regulation. Regulation 23/2000 Registered March 3, 2000

Persons who may have care and charge of pupils

1. The following persons may have care and charge of pupils:
 - a. school clinicians;
 - b. paraprofessionals* who are employed by school authorities to work with teachers and pupils as part of the teaching-learning process;
 - c. student-teachers;
 - d. volunteers; and
 - e. other persons authorized by the school board or its delegate.
2. A person who has care and charge of pupils must be a responsible adult.

Supervision

- 3(1) A clinician who has care and charge of pupils must be supervised directly by the principal. Any other person who has care and charge of pupils must be supervised directly by the principal or a teacher designated by the principal.
- 3(2) Subsection (1) is subject to any contrary direction of the school board.

Duties of paraprofessionals *

4. A paraprofessional* shall perform the duties assigned by the principal. Those duties may not include any of the following:
 - a. organizing or managing the classroom;
 - b. planning teaching strategies;
 - c. directing the learning experiences of pupils, including assessing individual needs, selecting materials to meet those needs and evaluating progress.

Student teachers

5. A student teacher who is registered as a student of a recognized teacher-training institution may be left in sole charge of classes for periods of time mutually agreed on by the principal and the teacher-training institution as being beneficial to the student teacher.

** Since this regulation was enacted, the government has moved to the use of the term "educational assistants".*

The Education Administration Act

Part V: Responsibilities of Principals

Principal's General Authority

28(1) Subject to the Public Schools Act and the instructions of the school board the principal is in charge of the school in respect of all matters of organization, management, instruction and discipline.

28(2) The principal is responsible for the supervision of staff, pupils, buildings and grounds during school hours.

First Things First: Preparing for Success

Principals and teachers are responsible for preparing educational assistants to work successfully. They not only establish the role of educational assistants but are also responsible for guidance and supervision.

Much of what an educational assistant does will depend on a teacher's judgment of the educational assistant's capabilities. Pre-service preparation should be taken seriously.

Starting Out Right

- Share the school's educational philosophy and your approach to teaching with the educational assistant.
- Discuss the provincial regulations on the use of educational assistants with the new person.
- Discuss the educational assistant's role in the school, emphasizing that the teacher has ultimate authority for educational programming for his/her students.
- Educate the person on the operation of the school, stressing the importance of confidentiality.
- Acquaint the person with school staff, including custodian, secretaries and others with whom there will be contact.
- Where applicable, brief the person on the community, its needs and values.
- Help the person become familiar with the school building, the work station(s), as well as the location of all teaching aids and materials.
- Introduce the educational assistant to the students. Help them understand the position and role of the educational assistant.
- Discuss the preservice and inservice training that may be required.

Getting It Done: Suggested Activities

Whether you're a principal or teacher, you take care of a thousand and one details each day. Educational assistants can help you make more effective use of your time by taking care of some of these details. The Society suggests the following tasks which are appropriate for EAs to perform.

NOTE: Principals and their staffs should develop and update role descriptions within the guidelines of Regulation 23/2000R and The Manitoba Teachers' Society policy to suit the specific local circumstances.

Clerical duties

- Collecting money, e.g. student fees, school pictures, etc.
- Writing supply orders.
- Keeping attendance records and checking on absences.
- Filing reports.
- Maintaining student records, e.g. marks, homework completed, books read, files, etc.
- Keeping inventory of equipment and supplies.
- Preparing library cards.
- Typing, duplicating, preparing visuals, transparencies, etc.
- Ordering and filing resource materials.
- Scheduling parent-teacher interviews—date, time, names, etc.
- Telephoning on routine matters, i.e. ordering visual resources, arranging field trip transportation, checking on orders.

Maintenance and administration duties

- Arranging materials for lessons.
- Supervising in school buildings, on playgrounds, in study halls and on field trips.
- Helping with coats, overshoes, etc.
- Keeping bulletin boards neat and current.
- Arranging interesting study areas, e.g. reading area, science corner, etc.
- Distributing and clearing away equipment.

General duties

- Obtaining visual materials, supplementary books, pictures, etc. and related equipment.
- Collecting test papers, projects, homework, etc.
- Assembling resource collections, indexing and storing, e.g. artifacts, minerals, maps, etc.
- Organizing and cataloguing resource materials, e.g. picture file.
- Arranging and supervising games under the direction of the teacher.
- Checking library books in and out and helping pupils locate library books.
- Helping with routine health tasks.
- Helping to make arrangements for programs, assemblies, etc.
- Making arrangements for student tours and field trips.
- Setting up, operating and removing audiovisual equipment.
- Maintaining audiovisual equipment on a regular schedule.

Instruction-related duties

- Marking objective tests and objective workbook exercises.
- Helping the teacher in the administration of objective tests.
- Preparing instructional materials, e.g. flash cards, cutouts, alphabet cards, business forms, chemical reagents, etc.
- Encouraging and promoting etiquette and good manners within the school.
- Preparing special demonstrations in art, science, etc.
- Telling or reading stories to groups or classes.
- Helping pupils locate research and reference materials suggested by the teacher.
- Being an enrichment or special interest topic resource assistant.
- Carrying out specific activities identified in Individual Education Programs (IEPs); life skills practice, physiotherapy, etc.

A word about liability

Although liability is a complex issue, teachers are responsible for the actions of educational assistants. Principals should carefully instruct educational assistants to the standard of the “reasonable and careful parent” as a guideline for anticipating and preventing injury to students. If you have any questions about liability, please contact your local association president or an MTS staff officer.

Duties of Teachers and Teachers' Assistants

A Summary

	Duties of Teachers	Joint Activities	Duties of Educational Assistants
Assessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess learning needs, based on class and individual student profiles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss student abilities, strengths and weaknesses. • Attend program-planning meetings at the teacher's request. 	
Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop programming based on required curriculum and individual student need, choose from available alternatives. • Prepare individual program plans (IEPs). • Maintain current student profiles and IEPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss desired outcomes for the student. • Discuss educational, behavioural and emotional goals. 	
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan lesson activities and choose resources. • Choose appropriate modifications to meet IEP specifications. • Establish priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the preparation of materials and modifications to the curriculum based on student needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in collecting, collating and organizing materials, creating displays and undertaking other supportive activities.
Supervising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a clearly understood classroom management structure, classroom rules and expectations for students. • Work within school management structures, school rules and expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet regularly to discuss student progress. • Discuss and clarify expectations for student behaviour and classroom rules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work within established school structures, including classroom management structures, behavioural rules and student expectations. • Document and report as appropriate.

Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement lesson plans and direct teaching related to those lesson plans. • Supervise and facilitate student learning. • Model techniques and appropriate language. • Provide resources for the assistants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify and share outcomes and experiences. • Discuss specific strategies, activities and outcomes. • Discuss workplace location. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify elements of the lesson for students. • Supervise reinforcement activities. • Reinforce specific techniques, strategies and language as directed by the teacher. • Document, monitor and report to the teacher.
Evaluating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and evaluate student progress and programs. • Monitor the implementation of the IEP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss observations. • Exchange information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe student behaviour and provide information to teachers. • Collect and record data for use in student evaluation. • Mark objective tests and assignments for the teacher to review.
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to parents and school team, (where appropriate) both formally and informally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss student information as appropriate. • Maintain confidentiality within policies and procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to teachers on students' strengths, achievements and needs. • Report to teachers on observed student behaviours and outcomes.
Staying Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep up to date on school, divisional, and provincial policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow policies and guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep up to date on school, divisional and provincial policies.

– Used with permission – adapted from the Alberta Teachers' Association Document.

Code of Professional Practice

The Code of Professional Practice establishes the required standards of conduct for all members of The Manitoba Teachers' Society. A teacher's professional behaviour must reflect the spirit as well as the letter of the Code.¹

1. A teacher's first professional responsibility is to her or his students.
2. A teacher acts with integrity and diligence in carrying out professional responsibilities.
3. A teacher avoids involvement in a conflict of interest, recognizes that a privileged relationship with students exists and refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological or other advantage.
4. A teacher speaks and acts with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with others, always mindful of their rights.
5. A teacher respects the confidential nature of information concerning students and may give the information only to authorized personnel or agencies directly concerned with the individual student's welfare.
6. A teacher's conduct toward colleagues is characterized by consideration and good faith.
7. A teacher first directs any criticism of the professional activity of a colleague to that colleague in private. Only after informing the colleague of the intent to do so, the complainant may direct in confidence the criticism to appropriate officials through the proper channels of communication.
8. A teacher shall not be considered in contravention of the Code in:
 - a. consulting with the Society or the president of the member's local association;
 - b. reporting reasonable grounds for suspected child abuse according to legal requirements.
9. A teacher does not bypass immediate authority to reach higher authority without first exhausting the proper channels of communication.

10. A teacher makes an ongoing effort to improve professionally.
11. A teacher adheres to collective agreements negotiated by the professional organization.
12. A teacher neither applies for nor accepts a position which is included in a Society in-dispute declaration.
13. A teacher or group of teachers makes only authorized representations to outside bodies on behalf of the Society or its local associations. Without the express permission of the Society, no member(s) conferring with outside bodies may explicitly or implicitly claim that they represent the Society or its local associations.

– 1 Violations of the Code shall be addressed through application of the Bylaws. Revised 2007.

Know the Limits: Prohibited Activities

While educational assistants can be a great help to principals and teachers, it is important to know the parameters for their activities. Legally, educational assistants are prohibited from carrying out many activities. They shall not in any way infringe on the responsibilities of the teacher.

Specifically, these are:

1. Planning and initiating learning activities.
2. Evaluating students or their work.
3. Substitute teaching during the hours employed as educational assistants.
4. Developing specific lesson plans.
5. Designing learning centres.
6. Choosing or designating learning activities.
7. Evaluating and selecting learning materials.
8. Evaluating the professional and non-professional staff.
9. Evaluating school programs.
10. Reporting to parents/guardians.
11. Sharing confidential information other than with the supervising teacher.

What to do about Prohibited Activity

If you become aware of another teacher engaging educational assistants in prohibited activities, take action.

1. Meet with the teacher to suggest the situation be corrected.
2. Failing a satisfactory resolution, get advice and assistance from your principal but only after telling the teacher you intend to do so.
3. If still convinced that prohibited activity persists, talk to your local association president and/or an MTS staff officer.

This procedure is clearly spelled out in the Code of Professional Practice (page 13).

Remember: clauses 7 and 8 of the code specify that it is unprofessional to make complaints about another teacher's practices to a third party without informing the other teacher and discussing the complaints with him/her.

Dealing with Inappropriate Behavior

How do you deal with inappropriate behavior on the part of an educational assistant? First, meet with the educational assistant to discuss the issue, model appropriate behaviour and offer strategies for change. If the situation does not improve, further action shall involve the educational assistant's supervisor.

When taking further action, however, be guided by the MTS Code of Professional Practice. While the code is written to govern the relationships among teachers, its advice on how to treat others involved in education is still sound.

One of the most relevant statements is contained in clause 7:

"A teacher first directs any criticism of the professional activity of a colleague to that colleague in private. Only after informing the colleague of the intent to do so, the complainant may direct in confidence the criticism to appropriate officials. It shall not be considered a breach of the Code:

- a. to report reasonable grounds for suspecting child abuse to proper authorities according to legal requirements.
- b. to consult with The Manitoba Teachers' Society or the president of the member's local association in good faith.

Some Real-Life Scenarios

The following questions are based on real situations reported by teachers.

Q: A teacher designed a phonics program to help meet the learning needs of a particular student. An assistant working one-on-one with the student believes that the program is inappropriate for the student and has said so to the student's parents. Can anything be done?

A: There are two concerns here. First, the assistant does not have the qualifications to assess the program and, as a result, is overstepping the role in commenting on its appropriateness. The assistant may well have some valid concerns based on her observations of the student's experience with the program. However, she should discuss these concerns with the teacher to determine if some adjustments are appropriate. Second, the assistant, by discussing the issue with the parents rather than with the teacher, has undermined the credibility of the teacher with the parents. If this happens, the teacher should explain to the assistant why her behavior is inappropriate and should not happen again. If the assistant does not acknowledge this, or repeats this conduct, the teacher should report the matter to the principal.

Q: My educational assistant is a creative person who comes up with fun ideas for the student she works with. My concern is that she occasionally decides on her own to have a student shift from doing school work to carrying out a fun project such as a Christmas craft. How much latitude should an educational assistant have to change activities that a teacher has planned?

A: The assistant may have felt that a shift to a more hands-on type of activity was necessary to address the emotional or behavioural needs of the student. However, the assistant should have checked with the teacher in advance not only to ensure that the alternative activities were appropriate but also to discuss how frequently such activities should be allowed to interrupt regular course work.

Q: An educational assistant tolerates unacceptable language and behaviour from a student. Although the teacher has directed the assistant to enforce a higher standard of conduct, so far she has not done so.

A: A primary educational goal for many special needs students is learning to recognize which behaviours are socially acceptable and which are not. The teacher should not only ask the assistant once again to require a higher level of conduct from the student but also explain to her how to respond to unacceptable behaviour. If the assistant continues to tolerate unacceptable behaviour from the student, the teacher should put the directive and suggested responses in writing. If the assistant still does not comply, the teacher should ask the principal to intervene.

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Q: When is the school administration responsible for training an assistant?

A: There is not simple answer to this question. Ideally, training should be undertaken jointly by the school and school board administration, the supervising teacher and the assistant. The administration is responsible for (1) hiring the assistant with proper qualifications, (2) providing assistants with a clear description of their roles and responsibilities and (3) making training opportunities available to them as needed. Teachers should ensure that they communicate their expectations clearly to assistants and provide them with appropriate feedback and support. Assistants should strive to meet and exceed teachers' expectations.

Q: My classroom assistant recently complained to the principal that I was not using her abilities to their fullest. She also told the principal that she could produce better student materials than the ones I provided and that I was not giving the students enough fun activities. What can I expect from the principal?

A: You can expect the principal to explain to the assistant why her behavior is unacceptable in discussing her concerns with her superior rather than with you directly. The principal should explain to the assistant that the approach she has taken is counterproductive to a good working relationship, and encourage her to speak directly to the teacher.

Q: A hospital that is providing therapy to one of my students sends information about the student directly to my educational assistant. Recently, the hospital invited the assistant to attend a case conference at the hospital. Shouldn't schools have guidelines in place concerning their relationship with external agencies that provide therapy or other services to students?

A: Yes. At minimum, schools should insist that the contact person at the school be a member of the professional staff, generally the classroom teacher. Educational assistants should be aware of this expectation and should refer all contacts from external agencies to the appropriate member of professional staff.

Q: An educational assistant works with a teacher who is often called out of the class to attend to other duties. During her absences, the teacher delegates to the assistant the task of completing the lesson and helping the class work through planned exercises. Is this acceptable?

A: Assigning such duties not only contravenes the Education Administration Act and the Code of Professional Practice but also constitutes an inappropriate educational practice. Students are entitled to receive instruction from qualified personnel. Although teachers who must attend meetings or be away from the classroom briefly for

some other reason may ask an assistant to supervise a class in their absence, they should not call on the assistant to provide more than very limited instruction. If teachers must be away for longer periods than required for the class to complete the assignment under the supervision of an assistant, they should arrange for a properly qualified substitute teacher. Assistants are not substitute teachers.

Q: An educational assistant works with one student on a modified program of studies. The student's parents want frequent progress reports. The assistant reports her observations of the student's behaviour to the teacher, who, in turn, interprets those behaviours and reports to the parents. Is this acceptable?

A: The educational assistant is right in reporting to the teacher rather than to the parents directly. The teacher is responsible for consulting frequently with the assistant, incorporating the observations of the assistant into his own analysis of the student's progress, diagnosing the student's learning needs and discussing those needs with the parents. If the parents call the educational assistant directly, the assistant should refer them to the teacher.

Q: A parent phones an educational assistant at home in the evening and on weekends to seek information about his child's behaviour and program and to give instructions on how the child is to be handled. Although the educational assistant accepts the calls, she resents the hours of unpaid time she spends on the telephone and feels that she is becoming an intermediary between the parent and the teacher. What should she do?

A: The educational assistant should tactfully but firmly ask the parent to direct his calls to the teacher. She should also ensure that school officials are aware of the situation and support her decision not to deal directly with the parent.

Notes

