

# PARAEDUCATORS



Encouragement and an ability to adapt instruction to different learning styles are vital to Charysse Miller, a paraeducator at Washington Grove ES. "I work a little differently with each child," says Ms. Miller, adding that the consistent contact allows her to monitor student progress. "It's so rewarding when you realize that you really have made a difference." Ms. Miller, who works mostly with second graders individually and in a reading group, will continue to make a difference for a long time. As an intern in a program to earn a master's degree and teacher certification, she is learning while helping others learn.

## **A VITAL PART OF THE LEARNING COMMUNITY**

In classrooms throughout the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), paraeducators assist teachers, reinforce instruction and provide individualized attention to students. Teachers rely on you to ensure that all students are challenged and are learning at the highest levels. Students rely on you for extra help. Parents rely on you for both reasons. Your contributions help promote successful classrooms, teachers and students.

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Every employee is involved in the mission of the Montgomery County Public Schools. The core goal is to improve teaching and learning for all students. Every job is important. This is clear in the school system's strategic plan, *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence*. The plan describes how employees work together on a common mission. This brochure illustrates the role of paraeducators in this plan.

## SUCCESS FOR EVERY STUDENT

Every day students must absorb new information and build on their knowledge to make meaningful progress. Working closely with teachers, you help ensure the success of every student, one of the four school system goals, by—

- ❑ helping preschool children increase their knowledge and their oral language, early literacy and numeracy skills for success in later studies;
- ❑ providing extra assistance to ensure that all students are reading proficiently by the end of Grade 2;

"Every day is a challenge," says Lourdes Mendez, special education paraeducator at Roberto Clemente MS—but it's a challenge she is eager to meet. Although she works with five classes in several disciplines, her main interest is in helping students improve their reading and writing for better communication. "They need to have these skills for their future," she says. Her fluency in Spanish as well as English is an added benefit in helping her communicate effectively with all students.



At Charles R. Drew ES, paraeducator Ruth Musicante does "a little bit of everything," but loves "working in small groups with children, particularly those who are struggling," she says. She also works with enrichment groups like the one at right. Ms. Musicante, past president of the paraeducators' chapter for SEIU Local 500, has worked for MCPS for 10 years and, like many of her colleagues, has consistently sought opportunities to improve her skills and knowledge. "The level of education and experience among paraeducators in Montgomery County far outshine what you're going to find elsewhere. These are extraordinarily qualified men and women. You find a tremendous number of individuals who have college degrees and who have had additional training," she says.



- ❑ working with students individually and in small groups to review and explain new material and concepts in a more personalized and targeted approach;
- ❑ assisting teachers with ongoing assessment of student progress and achievement;
- ❑ using a variety of teaching aids and strategies and adapting them to accommodate individual learning styles;
- ❑ reporting observations of students' difficulties and working with teachers to overcome these barriers to learning;
- ❑ assisting students with special needs such as learning disabilities and limited English proficiency;
- ❑ providing support that allows special education students to learn in the least restrictive environment;
- ❑ providing extra help to students in schools with a high percentage of low-income and at-risk students; and
- ❑ assisting teachers and other school staff in carrying out school procedures in a timely, efficient manner.

**For more information about the Montgomery County Public Schools, check [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org).**

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## AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

Your support is vital to helping schools provide an effective instructional program, the second of the four MCPS goals. In collaboration with teachers, you—

- ❑ help assess and report student performance, based on knowing the standards that students must meet;
- ❑ report observations on student achievement and learning skills to the teacher as an aid in developing instructional plans;
- ❑ help implement lesson plans in small-group instruction and support the smaller learning communities that many students need to succeed;
- ❑ guide students in an ongoing effort to develop information literacy skills;
- ❑ support a variety of special programs and activities that enhance the curriculum for all students, including gifted students, to prepare them for success in challenging instruction in later years;
- ❑ provide classroom support that allows teachers to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of all students;
- ❑ support a variety of special programs and other activities that enhance the curriculum;
- ❑ assist with classroom management and, when necessary, manage the entire class;
- ❑ provide support to students and staff in the use of computer technology and other equipment; and
- ❑ help organize instructional materials.

### DID YOU KNOW ...

- ❑ That MCPS has more than 2,200 paraeducators who work in schools throughout the county, mostly in elementary schools?
- ❑ That paraeducators work in a variety of classroom situations, including general education and special education?
- ❑ That many paraeducators participate in MCPS partnership programs with universities to earn teacher certification?
- ❑ That many paraeducators take staff development courses and participate in other training to increase their knowledge and skills?

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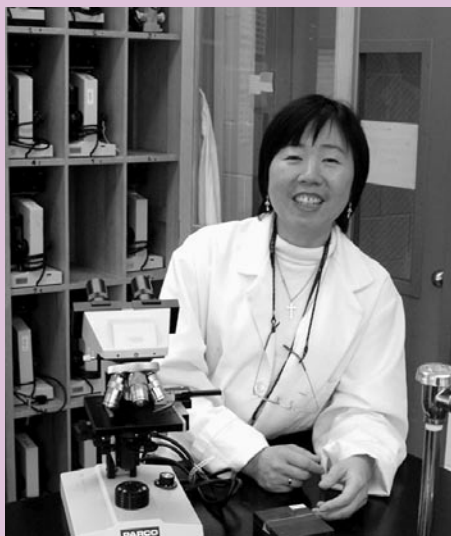
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## PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

In a team effort with other staff, you help strengthen productive partnerships for education, the third MCPS goal, by—

- ❑ helping teachers work with students' families to support education at home;
- ❑ assisting with activities that encourage parents and other community members to become involved with the school and their children's education;
- ❑ working cooperatively with parents and other community members who volunteer in schools;
- ❑ assisting with projects sponsored by local businesses and community groups to improve education;
- ❑ serving on school advisory committees, leadership teams and work groups to improve student and school performance; and
- ❑ serving as a mentor and an advocate for students.

Aida O'Donnell wears two hats at Wheaton HS, where she is a paraeducator in special education and in science. With a bachelor's degree in medical technology, Ms. O'Donnell makes quick work of setting up labs for teachers and taking care of the chemical inventory. She keeps "a special eye" on the mainstreamed special education students, ensuring that they are organized and ready for class and giving them prompts and homework reminders, but monitors all students. "I often ask them questions to see if they really understand, and if a student is struggling, I tell the teacher," she says. The best part of her job? "To see a student get excited about learning."



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A typical school day includes a variety of diverse activities for Catherine Cleiman, paraeducator at Broad Acres ES, who leads an after-school homework club. "For many students, this is the only help they can



get," Mrs. Cleiman says. "If it weren't for us, some of them wouldn't get their homework done." She also participates in weekly after-school sessions in which teachers and paraeducators study topics in education, share information and examine student work to ensure that students are meeting standards. "It really helps us to talk about strategies—what works and what doesn't work," she says.

## A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

As a vital part of the staff, you help to create a positive work environment in a self-renewing organization, the fourth school system goal. In fulfilling this role, you—

- ❑ work with administration and staff, parents and other stakeholders on teams to implement the Baldrige-guided school improvement process in your school;
- ❑ participate in training offered by the Office of Organizational Development and by your school to help implement new programs and curricula and increase your skills and knowledge;
- ❑ help create and maintain a classroom environment conducive to learning;
- ❑ adapt to new assignments to help your school meet changing student, staff and program needs; and
- ❑ perform clerical and other noninstructional work that contributes to the smooth operation of the classroom.

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

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## THE BIG PICTURE

In our busy world, where teachers and parents juggle many responsibilities, you can make the critical difference in a child's success and well-being. In working closely with students, you may perceive their strengths and weaknesses and what strategies improve their understanding, while also gaining insight into any barriers to learning, such as possible disabilities or personal problems. By bringing these concerns to the teacher, you ensure that students receive the appropriate intervention to help them succeed academically and personally.



Husan Smith, special education paraeducator at Thomas W. Pyle MS, helps all students, although his "number one priority is the special education kid." Mr. Smith, a graduate of Col. Zadok Magruder HS, comes from a family of educators and "wouldn't want to do anything else but work with children." In eight years at Pyle, he has helped students in various disciplines and levels of instruction, but imparts a common message of caring. "They'll try harder," he says. "They'll be willing to go above and beyond the call of duty if you show them you love them."

## OUR CALL TO ACTION: A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

*Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence* was approved by the Board of Education in May 2004. This strategic plan guides the work of all MCPS schools, offices and employees in their commitment to achieving specific goals for student success through a detailed system of strategies, initiatives and implementation schedules.

Viers Mill ES feels like home to para-educator Tammy Arthur, who lives in the neighborhood, whose daughter attended Viers Mill and now teaches there, and whose granddaughter is enrolled there. "It's wonderful. There's a sense of history," says Arthur, who was active in the PTA as a parent and who advises the PTA on occasion. Arthur assists in all subjects in kindergarten and works with pupils in literacy centers. And, she says, the students "can see their teacher at the grocery store and in their neighborhood. We're not just people they see in school."



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