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Enid Ann Schonewise

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**THE CURRENT TRAINING PRACTICES  
AND PERCEIVED TRAINING NEEDS  
OF PARAPROFESSIONALS  
IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
IN NEBRASKA**

by

**Enid Ann Schonewise**

**A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska at Omaha  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education  
Major: Educational Administration  
Under the Supervision of Dr. Martha Bruckner  
Omaha, Nebraska**

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DISSERTATION TITLE

The Current Training Practices and Perceived Training Needs  
of Paraprofessionals in Special Education Programs in Nebraska

BY

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**ABSTRACT****THE CURRENT TRAINING PRACTICES AND PERCEIVED TRAINING NEEDS OF  
PARAPROFESSIONALS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NEBRASKA****Enid Ann Schonewise EdD****University of Nebraska at Omaha 2001****Advisor Dr. Martha Bruckner**

**The purpose of this study was to determine (a) the current training practices for paraprofessionals as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in special education programs in the state of Nebraska, (b) the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals, as viewed by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals, (c) the differences that exist between current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals and the differences that exist in perceptions of building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals, and (d) the changes that have occurred in training practices since 1982.**

**Building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in Nebraska were surveyed in reference to their perceptions of paraprofessional training. Fifty percent of the building principals and assistant principals, 56% of the special education teachers, and 57% of the paraprofessionals returned surveys for a 55% overall return rate. The data was then analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive analysis, two way ANOVAS along with frequency distributions were used to complete the analysis. The findings indicated that more training is being provided in Nebraska than in 1982. The**

findings also noted a large discrepancy between the number of hours of training building principals believed was being provided as compared to what paraprofessionals believed was actually happening. There was also a significant finding comparing current practice and perceived need. The findings showed that much more training is needed than is currently being provided in all of the 11 topic areas reviewed in this study. These 11 areas included: school policies, legal and ethical issues, job roles and responsibilities, knowledge of disabling conditions, behavior management, tutoring techniques, recording and reporting student behavior, instructional materials, equipment operations, first aid, and job specific skills



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

**Dedicated to the loving memory of John H. Schonewise**

**A sincere thank you to my family, friends and colleagues for  
their continued support during this process.**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	2
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	4
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....	16
<b>Introduction</b> .....	16
<b>Statement of the Problem</b> .....	19
<b>Purpose of the Study</b> .....	19
<b>Research Questions</b> .....	20
<b>Theoretical Perspective</b> .....	20
<b>Assumptions</b> .....	22
<b>Limitations</b> .....	22
<b>Delimitations</b> .....	22
<b>Operational Definitions</b> .....	23
<b>Significance of Study</b> .....	24
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	25
<b>Review of Related Literature</b> .....	25
<b>Evolution of the Paraprofessional's Role</b> .....	25
<b>The History of Paraprofessionals</b> .....	25
<b>The Advent of Differentiated Staffing</b> .....	30
<b>Usage of Paraprofessionals</b> .....	31

	6
<b>Paraprofessional's Impact on Students .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Legal Implications .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Why Paraprofessional Roles were Created .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>The Role of the Paraprofessional in Education .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Moral and Ethical Issues for Paraprofessionals.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Defining the Paraprofessional Role .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>The Role of the Classroom Teacher .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Training of Paraprofessionals .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Training Issues .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Lack of Training .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Training Topics .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Training Methods .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Career Development .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Training Needs .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Research on Paraprofessionals' Training and Needs .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Vasa, Steckelberg and Ronning (1982) .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>French and Cabell (1993).....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Passaro, Pickett, Latham and HongBo (1994).....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>59</b>

	7
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Research Methods.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Design .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Population and Sample .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Questionnaire Development.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Procedures .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Response Rate.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Demographic Data.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Data Analysis .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>68</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 4 .....</b>	 <b>70</b>
<b>Results and Interpretation .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Research Questions .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Findings of the Study .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Research Question One.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Research Question Two.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Research Question Three.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Initial Training.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>On Going Training.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Training Outside the District.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>School Policies .....</b>	<b>88</b>

	8
Legal Issues.....	88
Job Role Expectations .....	98
Knowledge of Disability.....	98
Behavior Management .....	109
Tutoring .....	109
Observing and Recording Student Behavior .....	119
Instructional Materials .....	119
Equipment Operation.....	128
First Aid and Safety .....	128
Job Specific Skills.....	128
Research Question Four.....	141
Summary .....	144
 CHAPTER 5 .....	 146
Summary .....	146
Purpose .....	147
Conclusions .....	147
Research Question One.....	148
Research Question Two.....	150
Research Question Three.....	152
Perceptions of Current Training Practices .....	153
Perceived Training Needs .....	154
Research Question Four.....	155

**Discussion..... 156**

**Recommendation ..... 159**

**Recommendations for Schools and Districts..... 159**

**Recommendations for the Nebraska Department of Education ..... 161**

**Recommendations for Further Research.....162**

**Summary ..... 164**

**References..... 165**

**LIST OF APPENDIXES**

<b>APPENDIX A: Nebraska State Statute 79-1233.....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Nebraska State Statute 79-101.....</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: Nebraska Department of Education Position Paper.....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: Nebraska Professional Practices Commission Statement.....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: IRB Letter .....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: Initial Request Letter.....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>APPENDIX G: 1982 Survey Advisory Committee Members .....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>APPENDIX H: Paraprofessional Survey - Administrators.....</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>APPENDIX I: Paraprofessional Survey - Teachers .....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>APPENDIX J: Paraprofessional Survey - Paraprofessionals .....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>APPENDIX K: Thank You Letter .....</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>APPENDIX L: Percentage Tables .....</b>	<b>216</b>

**LIST OF FIGURES**

**1. Perceived Initial Training which Should be Provided ..... 75**



## LIST OF TABLES

1.	Perceived Clock Hours of Training Provided for Paraprofessionals in a Year and Survey Response Numbers.....	74
2.	Training Topic Areas in Order of Perceived Need Based on Mean Score.....	76
3.	Training Topic Areas in Order of Perceived Need: Average of All Three Groups Combined .....	78
4.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Initial Paraprofessional Training Provided by District .....	80
5.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Initial Paraprofessional Training Provided by District .....	81
6.	Regarding Initial Paraprofessional Training Provided by District.....	82
7.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Initial Paraprofessional Training Provided by District .....	83
8.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding On-Going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District.....	84
9.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding On-Going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District .....	85
10.	Regarding On-Going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District .....	86
11.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding On-Going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District .....	87
12.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Outside of District Paraprofessional Training.....	89
13.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Outside of District Paraprofessional Training .....	90
14.	Regarding Outside of District Paraprofessional Training.....	91
15.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Outside of District Paraprofessional Training.....	92

	13
16.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding School Policies Paraprofessional Training..... 93
17.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding School Policies Paraprofessional Training ..... 94
18.	Regarding School Policies Paraprofessional Training..... 95
19.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding School Policies Paraprofessional Training..... 96
20.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Legal Issues Paraprofessional Training ..... 97
21.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Legal Issues Paraprofessional Training..... 99
22.	Regarding Legal Issues Paraprofessional Training ..... 100
23.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Legal Issues Paraprofessional Training .. 101
24.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Job Role Expectations Paraprofessional Training..... 102
25.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Job Role Expectations Paraprofessional Training ..... 103
26.	Regarding Job Role Expectations Paraprofessional Training ..... 104
27.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Job Role Expectations Paraprofessional Training ..... 105
28.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Knowledge of Disabilities Paraprofessional Training..... 106
29.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Knowledge of Disabilities Paraprofessional Training ..... 107
30.	Regarding Knowledge of Disabilities Paraprofessional Training..... 108
31.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Knowledge of Disabilities Paraprofessional Training ..... 110

	14
32.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Behavior Management Paraprofessional Training ..... 111
33.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Behavior Management Paraprofessional Training ..... 112
34.	Regarding Behavior Management Paraprofessional Training..... 113
35.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Behavior Management Paraprofessional Training ..... 114
36.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Tutoring Paraprofessional Training ..... 115
37.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Tutoring Paraprofessional Training ..... 116
38.	Regarding Tutoring Paraprofessional Training..... 117
39.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Tutoring Paraprofessional Training ..... 118
40.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Observing, Recording Student Behavior Paraprofessional Training ..... 120
41.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Observing, Recording Student Behavior Paraprofessional Training ..... 121
42.	Regarding Observing, Recording Student Behavior Paraprofessional Training .. 122
43.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Observing, Recording Student Behavior Paraprofessional Training ..... 123
44.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Instructional Materials Paraprofessional Training ..... 124
45.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Instructional Materials Paraprofessional Training ..... 125
46.	Regarding Instructional Materials Paraprofessional Training..... 126
47.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Instructional Materials Paraprofessional Training ..... 127

	15
48.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Equipment Operation Paraprofessional Training ..... 129
49.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Equipment Operation Paraprofessional Training..... 130
50.	Regarding Equipment Operation Paraprofessional Training ..... 131
51.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Equipment Operation Paraprofessional Training ..... 132
52.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding First-Aid and Safety Paraprofessional Training ..... 133
53.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding First-Aid and Safety Paraprofessional Training..... 134
54.	Regarding First-Aid and Safety Paraprofessional Training ..... 135
55.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding First-Aid and Safety Paraprofessional Training ..... 136
56.	Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Regarding Job-Specific Skills Paraprofessional Training..... 137
57.	Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs Regarding Job-Specific Skills Paraprofessional Training..... 138
58.	Regarding Job-Specific Skills Paraprofessional Training ..... 139
59.	Simple Main Effects Tests: Regarding Job-Specific Skills Paraprofessional Training ..... 140
60.	Perceived Number of Training Hours Paraprofessionals Receive in One Year... 143
61.	Perceptions of No Training Offered to Newly Employed Paraprofessionals ..... 145

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Quality instruction is an essential ingredient to arouse students' curiosity and to inspire their desire to learn. There is an overwhelming consensus among educators and policy makers that a vital component of quality instruction is a well-qualified, well-trained instructional staff, supported by administrators. Paraprofessionals can be a critical part of that staff. Several studies have found that paraprofessionals improved the quality of instruction when used and trained appropriately (Pickett, 1990; Lacattiva, 1985; Lenz, 1985).

With the increasing needs and individualization of special education and general education students, coupled with budget cuts and the shortage of teachers, the hiring rate of paraprofessionals has increased. In a study of Chapter 1 programs, it was discovered that paraprofessionals were hired at double the rate of teachers over a span from 1986-1992. During that time, teachers were hired at a 4.3% increase while paraprofessionals were hired at a 10.1% increase (ERS Spectrum, 1994). The use of paraprofessionals in the United States has been common over the past four decades. The numbers have increased dramatically over the last few years, with all indications that their use will continue to grow. In his state of America Education Address (1999), Education Secretary Riley called upon governors and state legislatures to take a hard and honest look at the profession of teaching. He stated that the nation would need to hire 2.2 million teachers over the next 10 years. Of those 2.2 million, many will be teachers of special education, which have been consistently in short supply. Eleven percent of special education teachers

leave the profession each year as opposed to 6% of general education teachers (Riley, 1999). It is important to note that of the 11% of special education teachers, 5% will move into general education (Crutchfield, 1997). With the increased demand for teachers on the horizon, it seems reasonable that more paraprofessionals will be utilized. Doyle (1995) predicts that paraprofessionals will be one of the fastest growing positions over the next 10 to 20 years.

Not only are school districts hiring more paraprofessionals, but paraprofessionals are also being asked to provide more services and accept more responsibility. They participate in all phases of the instructional process. Paraprofessionals are now involved in related service areas including speech therapy, physical and occupational therapy, crisis intervention for students with behavioral and emotional problems, early intervention and preschool programs, and case management (Pickett, 1990).

In 1969, the Nebraska Unicameral enacted Neb. Rev. Section 79-1233 (Appendix A), which permitted Nebraska schools to employ non-certified teacher aids, provided they were not assigned teaching responsibilities and as long as they were prepared for the duties assigned. In 1971, legislation was passed defining teaching in Nebraska, Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-101 (Appendix B). This legislation further clarified the responsibilities of paraprofessionals. Also in 1971, the Professional Practices Commission published a document pertaining to the use of paraprofessionals, which was amended in 1977 (Appendix C). The focus of this document was to define the roles of teachers and paraprofessionals. In 1972, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) initiated a position by disseminating a document interpreting and clarifying the use of

paraprofessionals in Nebraska schools (Appendix D). There is and has been a concern that unprepared or untrained individuals are being hired and placed into positions of responsibility. Vasa, Steckelberg and Ronning (1982) examined the use of paraprofessionals in special education in the state of Nebraska. They found that although paraprofessionals were widely used across the state, at the time little attention was being paid to the selection criteria or preparation of the paraprofessionals. The paraprofessionals, special education teachers and building administrators surveyed in Vasa et al. (1982) study agreed that there was a need to provide adequate training for paraprofessionals.

To further illustrate the need for training of paraprofessionals, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was revised in 1997, mandated the training of paraprofessionals to ensure a level of competency among paraprofessionals. Due to concerns that the paraprofessionals were not being trained to perform the type of tasks they were being asked to perform, the IDEA included a statement mandating that all paraprofessionals be trained and supervised (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997). One could assume that if the IDEA mandated training for paraprofessionals that all schools are complying with that mandate. However, there has been little research done in Nebraska since the Vasa et al. (1982) study to confirm that training is being done. The 1982 study showed that there was considerable discrepancy between the reports of building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in their perceptions of the current training practices for paraprofessionals in their districts. Sixty percent of the administrators said no formal in-service was provided to paraprofessionals, but 81% of the

paraprofessionals indicated that no training was provided for newly employed paraprofessionals. Because the Vasa et al. study (1982) was done prior to the IDEA's requirement, it was unknown if the amount of training of paraprofessionals had increased. Therefore, it was important to examine the current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals working in special education programs in Nebraska.

### Statement of the Problem

There are state and federal regulations which require that paraprofessionals who work with special education students be trained. It is unclear if this mandated training is taking place within the state of Nebraska. Results from a statewide study in Nebraska in 1982 indicated that frequently little or no formal training existed (Vasa et al., 1982). It is uncertain if building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals believe that their school districts are meeting the guidelines for the training of paraprofessionals who work with special education students within the state of Nebraska.

### Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were to determine (a) the current training practices for paraprofessionals as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in special education programs in the state of Nebraska; (b) the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals, as viewed by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals; (c) the differences that exist between current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals and the differences that exist in perceptions of building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals; and (d) the changes that have occurred in training practices since 1982.



### Research Questions

1. What are the current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

2. What are the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

3. What are the differences in perceptions about current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

4. What changes have occurred in training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska since 1982?

### Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical basis for this study was derived from the premise that training improves performance. If a person is instructed correctly, he or she will be able to perform the task more efficiently and with improved results.

Adult learners are unique in the ways in which they learn. They have specific needs in the areas of cognition and interpersonal orientation (Bents & Howey, 1981).

Knowles (1978) developed the following principles for the foundation of theory on adult learning: (a) adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, these needs and interests are appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities; (b) adult orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects; (c) experience is the richest resource for adult learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience; (d) adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry rather than to transmit knowledge to adults and then evaluate their conformity to it; and (e) individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning. If training programs take into account how adults learn and develop, the program's effectiveness could be enhanced.

More specifically, in the education arena, Joyce and Showers (1980) have developed an effective training process. They indicate that in order to improve classroom teacher effectiveness through training or professional development the following must occur (a) presentation of theory or description of skills or strategy, (b) modeling or demonstration of skills or models of teaching, (c) practice in simulated and classroom settings, (d) structured and open-ended feedback (provision of information about performance), and (e) classroom application (hands on, in-class- room assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom).

When all five techniques are used appropriately in the training process, the level of

effectiveness in teaching increases dramatically (Joyce & Showers, 1980). Based on the theory of adult learning, and on Joyce and Showers' specific training techniques for teacher improvement, one can assume that training will improve production and effectiveness. Paraprofessionals who are appropriately trained will improve in their effectiveness and in classroom performance.

### Assumptions

The assumptions of this study were as follows: (a) the respondents who participate in the study will understand the questions and give accurate and honest answers, (b) the questionnaires will be a valid measure of the research questions, (c) the respondents have the ability to recollect prior training or the training which occurs in their district, (d) the special education directors/supervisors will administer the questionnaires to the paraprofessionals whose major responsibility is working with students in special education, and (e) the special education directors/supervisors will administer the questionnaires to the building administrators who have special education programs in their buildings.

### Limitations

The limitations of the study included the following: (a) the questionnaire was based on self-reporting which may result in biased answers, (b) participation in the study was voluntary which may have lead to decreased participation, (c) to assure manageability of the collected data, survey instruments used only multiple choice items and did not include open-ended response items, and (d) comparisons to the 1982 study were influenced due to the fact that data collection methods used in the 1982 were no longer viable and the populations surveyed have changed.

### Delimitations

The study was delimited in that the population consisted of the districts represented in the Nebraska Association for Special Education Supervisors. Most members of NASES represent relatively large school districts in the state.

### Operational Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following were operationally defined.

Special Education is specifically designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with a verified disability, including classroom instruction, instruction in physical education, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. The term includes speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy if the service consists of specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) was amended and renamed in 1997. These are federal special education laws and regulations. The act outlines requirements for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the least restrictive environment within public education.

Rule 51 (92 NAC-51) is the Nebraska regulation for the operation of special education programs and is Nebraska's interpretation of IDEA.

Individual Education Plan (I. E. P.) is outlined in Rule 51; it is a written statement for a handicapped child that is developed and implemented in accordance with restrictions supplied by IDEA.

Paraprofessionals are also known as: paras, teacher's aides, teacher partners, teacher associates, teacher assistants, and paraeducators. Paraprofessionals are individuals who serve under the supervision of a certified or licensed staff member as an assistant in the education process. They may also assist in residential care under the supervision of certified staff.

Training is defined as appropriate instruction that provides paraprofessionals with adequate skills, knowledge and information necessary to complete job skills competently.

### Significance of Study

There is a lack of research on the current training practices for paraprofessionals in Nebraska. One of the most recent comprehensive studies of paraprofessional use within the state, was completed by Vasa et al. (1982). School districts need to know if they are abiding by Nebraska Statutes and the IDEA requirements in regards to paraprofessional training. School districts should also be aware of the perceived training needs of their employees in order to maximize productivity. The information compiled from this study can be used by school districts in Nebraska to analyze current training practices and assess perceived training needs. School officials in Nebraska and other states will be able to use the data to make some broad comparisons to their own districts to determine if their training methods are adequate and effective. This information could assist districts in systematically evaluating their paraprofessional training programs.

The conclusions derived from this study will also be available for review by the Nebraska Department of Education and other appropriate agencies. The study could assist agencies in assessing current paraprofessional training programs and practices.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Related Literature

Paraprofessionals in education have been the focus of numerous studies (Fafard, 1977; French & Cabell, 1993; Vasa et al., 1982). The results from these studies showed a major increase in the number of paraprofessionals employed in education during the second half of the twentieth century and a transition in responsibilities of the paraprofessional from housekeeping duties to supervision of student activities.

This chapter reviews the evolution of the paraprofessional, the specific roles of the paraprofessional, and the training and training needs of paraprofessionals. It also discusses the paraprofessionals' role in the classroom and their effect on student learning. Chapter II concludes with a description of the limited research done on the training of paraprofessionals in Nebraska and a summary of the literature review.

### Evolution of the Paraprofessional

#### The History of Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals have been active members of the work force since the beginning of this century. However, during this time their roles and duties have changed dramatically.

Paraprofessionals may have originated as community-based workers who were first employed in the great settlement house projects of the early 1900s, such as Henry Street in New York City and Hull House in Chicago. Later, several New Deal programs, notably the Social Security Act of 1935, the Works Progress Administration, and the National Youth Administration used "non-professional" workers to provide services

(Pickett 1984). Earlier in the century, various professionals assessed the needs of persons with special needs and left the moment-to-moment care, training, and education to untrained personnel or others such as parents or volunteers. Subsequent experiments in hiring and using paraprofessionals were cited by some, as one of the most conceptually sound and valid strategies attempted in human services (Savino, Kennedy & Brody, 1968).

Little was done to improve paraprofessionals' status in the 1940's. However, a rediscovery of the potential for utilization of paraprofessionals began in the late 1950's and 1960's. Administrators and service providers, confronted by a shortage of professional staff personnel, began to look for an alternative means of providing services in order to alleviate an emerging performance gap throughout the human services. This was particularly true in public schools, mental health services, and health care. One of the most noted programs during this era was an effort supported by the Ford Foundation in Bay City, Michigan. Their focus was to recruit and train paraprofessionals to perform clerical and housekeeping duties. The hiring of paraprofessionals would allow teachers to spend more time in the instruction of students (Schrag, 1986).

With this in mind, and the rising demand for assistants in human service provider communities, re-evaluation of the role of the paraprofessional was a priority of policy makers and educators. These adjustments were outlined by Gerlach and Pickett (1997) and they include:

1. continuing efforts to include youth with special needs in the general education classrooms and their communities (Blalock, 1991; Hales & Carlson, 1992; Hofmeister, 1993);

2. growing need for occupational and physical therapy and speech-language pathology services for children and youth of all ages (Fenichel & Eggbeer, 1990);
3. increasing numbers of students who came from ethnic and language minority heritages in school systems nationwide (Ebenstein & Gooler, 1993; Haselkorn & Fiedler, 1996);
4. on-going shortages of teachers and related service personnel;
5. changing and expanding roles of school professionals as classroom and program managers (French & Pickett, 1997; Pickett, Vasa, & Steckelberg, 1993).

These developments along with continuing growth in student populations have made a significant impact on the role of the paraprofessional in special education.

Personnel were needed to assist teachers with clerical and routine duties to allow the teachers more time to spend on instructional tasks. Almost every suburban community had its cadre of well-educated mothers anxious to put their free time and college backgrounds to constructive use (Gartner & Riessman, 1974, p. 4).

Schools seemed the logical choice because the mothers could be on the same schedule as their children, and the work was usually part-time with varied duties and flexible work. The duties of the paraprofessionals were often mundane, frequently boring, usually consisting of clerical and housekeeping chores that teachers were happy to relinquish.

By the 1960s, schools began to take on a different character. In 1957, a demonstration project was initiated by Cruickshank and Haring, who investigated for the first time the responsibilities of paraprofessionals in the field of special education. The



investigation exposed the primary responsibilities of the paraprofessionals in varied educational settings. Cruickshank and Haring included an examination of three varied settings (a) a kindergarten general education classroom that included students with blindness, (b) a classroom including students labeled gifted, and (c) six different types of self-contained special education classrooms. Within the three categories, the aides' (paraprofessionals') responsibilities were non-instructional tasks such as playground supervision, housekeeping tasks in the classroom, material preparation, and record keeping.

Cruickshank and Haring (1957) found that the use of teacher assistants provided an opportunity for the professional teacher to better utilize educational skills. In their study of paraprofessional effectiveness, Cruickshank and Haring found further support for the assumption that paraprofessionals could be utilized in the instructional process. Compensatory education for disadvantaged pupils, individualized educational opportunities for the handicapped, special programs for culturally diverse groups, and government programs were put into place to support the delivery of special services. These opportunities all stimulated growth and focused new attention on paraprofessionals. Teachers needed instructional help as well as clerical assistance. As a consequence, paraprofessionals found themselves involved in the instruction process (Green & Barnes, 1989).

At first, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) was one of the largest employers of paraprofessionals (Pickett, 1986). By June 30, 1965, some 25,000 paraprofessionals were working in Community Action Programs with more than 46,000 in

the Head Start Program. When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was amended to encourage employment of paraprofessionals in Title I programs, the number skyrocketed. Blessing (1967) discovered that paraprofessionals in the Title I positions were being utilized to perform non-instructional tasks. Ebenson (1966) and Blessing (1967) agreed that increasing and expanding the duties of the paraprofessional would have a positive impact on instruction due to the increasing shortage of teachers. This new phase would give appropriate supervision to the paraprofessionals and place them in a role performing instructional activities.

Vocational education and manpower training legislation further swelled the total number of paraprofessionals working in the United States. The Education Professions Development Act of 1967 (EPDA) introduced the career development philosophy of employing paraprofessionals and giving them on-the-job training for eventual careers in education. Prodded by all this and faced in the 1960s with a tight teacher market, many school officials threw away their elaborate restrictions on hiring and began to employ local citizens as paraprofessionals. Many of these new hires had formerly been considered unemployable (Gartner & Riessman, 1974; Nelson, 1967).

The changing role and function of auxiliary personnel also occurred during the late 1960's. The term "teacher's aide" was first used to describe someone who performed routine but necessary jobs in the school in order to free the teacher for tasks requiring their professional skills. The "aides" generally had menial jobs involving minimal contact with students. The responsibilities consisted primarily of routine clerical tasks such as collecting milk money, preparing bulletin boards, checking attendance, preparing materials

for instruction, and typing. During the late 1960s, the rationale for the utilization of auxiliary personnel in education was extended beyond merely freeing the teacher to make a more effective contribution to the educational process. This new responsibility presupposed a dual role: assisting with routine duties and with the teaching-learning process. The additional function included tutoring individual students, leading small groups, and classroom instruction follow-up (Pigford & Hale, 1995).

### The Advent of Differentiated Staffing

During the 1960's and 1970's many federal programs were being started to assist the employment of paraprofessionals. A new educational structure called "differentiated staffing" began to emerge in schools. The structure created a hierarchy of positions among professional and paraprofessional employees alike. Some professionals were elevated to leadership roles and others kept their positions as classroom teachers. This left the paraprofessional as the lowest level on the newly designed school structure (McClain & Handmaker, 1993). The roles of the paraprofessional also moved from general classroom duties to more specialized skills. Supporters of differentiated staffing believed understanding education in a broad sense was no longer sufficient to meet society's expectations for educational professionals. They suggested that educational training should follow the medical model. Education should adopt a model similar to medicine, training individuals to move from general practice towards specialization. These supporters believed that training in specialty areas was needed to focus on a specific area of expertise, which would result in more satisfied and effective staff members.

Differentiated staffing facilitated the development of competent learners, resulting in a

fulfilling and positive educational experience for all students (McClain & Handmaker, 1993).

This role expansion was reinforced by the guidelines for receiving Federal funds. Under acts like The Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Education Professions Development Act (EPDA) of 1967, employment and training of auxiliary personnel services in education, health, and social work were enhanced. The new career movement was another significant factor in the increased responsibility and status of auxiliary personnel. This was first documented by Pearl and Riessman (1965) in the book New Careers for the Poor. The movement emphasized that with direct and significant contact, the low-income workers could make a positive contribution to the education of children in low-income areas (Pigford & Hale, 1995).

The differentiated staffing movement supported the use of paraprofessionals in the educational systems. The movement created a hierarchical structure that funded more positions for additional paraprofessionals, some with specialized skills. The movement brought additional paraprofessionals into schools to assist in the education of all students.

#### Usage of Paraprofessionals

The paraprofessional label encompasses paid (or occasionally volunteer) workers who share a variety of job titles. Earlier terms that are now outdated include “non-professional” and “attendant”; even the term “aide” has been replaced in many programs by “assistant” or “technician” (Blalock, 1991). Some current titles include educational paraprofessional or instructional teacher assistant. Additional job titles include home or

community liaison (sometimes a professional position), house parent and occupational or physical therapy assistant. Paraprofessionals are also employed as speech/language therapist assistants, recreation aides, mental health workers, job coaches, childcare workers, and developmental disabilities technicians.

Research results (e.g. Blalock, 1991, Logue, 1992, Passaro, Pickett, Latham & HongBo, 1994) provide the following insights into the characteristics of paraprofessionals:

(a) the majority (approximately 95%) of paraprofessionals are women working for near minimum wage; (b) there has been a shift from clerical and other support duties to more instructional involvement with special education students (the most common responsibilities centering around the delivery of guided and independent practice); (c) the trend towards increasing paraprofessional involvement with students is strong and increasing; and (d) job satisfaction is typically low.

Pickett (1986) described paraprofessionals as “the fastest growing yet most under-recognized, under-prepared, and therefore under-utilized category of personnel in the service delivery system” (p. 41).

One rationale for the introduction of more adults into the classroom was that it would bring more individual attention to disadvantaged youngsters who desperately need extra assistance. Paraprofessionals could also free teachers from their clerical, housekeeping, and monitoring duties in order to enable them to spend more time actually teaching. The hiring of poor and educationally disadvantaged persons from the neighborhood could also develop a positive connection between the school and community while providing positive role models for students. It was thought that the

paraprofessional could be the disadvantaged child's friend-in-need, potential counselor, model, and sustainer of hope. The mere presence of the paraprofessional in the classroom would provide hope to many disadvantaged children, because the paraprofessional was one of them. The paraprofessionals also might be better able to accomplish home visits and make other connections because they were from the same community and spoke the same language (Gartner & Riessman, 1974). With special education services on the rise, paraprofessionals appeared to be a feasible alternative for meeting the needs of students with special needs (Frith & Lindsey, 1982).

During the 1980's the demand of individualized programs and emphasis on client rights created an awareness and appreciation of support staff (Lorenz, 1994). There became a need for additional staff in special education programs if schools were to supply every student with the best possible education in the least restrictive environment.

It appeared that hiring of paraprofessionals was an idea whose time had arrived. Teachers had been asserting for years, through such agencies as the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (NCTEPS), that their jobs were slowed with trivial and unmanageable duties. With the cry for the individualization of instruction, the question was raised as to how the teacher would be able to individualize instruction without extra eyes, ears, and hands. As low-income paraprofessionals began to make their way into schools and make themselves useful in literally hundreds of jobs, another idea took hold. If there was this workforce of effective people, why not train them into full-time career holders in education (Gartner & Riessman, 1974; Nelson, 1967; Pearl & Riessman, 1965)?

Special education currently employs the highest percentage of paraprofessionals in schools. Paraprofessionals are used in a wide variety of settings: Title 1, vocational education, speech and occupational therapy, and general education.

#### Paraprofessional's Impact on Students

As paraprofessionals had a direct impact on student learning, their positions became more accepted (Dear, Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1987; Lenz, 1985; Pickett, 1986). Gartner, Jackson and Riessman (1977) indicated that the utilization of paraprofessionals resulted in gains in children's reading, verbalization and interaction. Fafard (1977) indicated that paraprofessionals working with special needs children directly affected the students' academic performance. However, little has been documented regarding the paraprofessionals' effectiveness in their specific roles (Doyle, 1995).

#### Legal Implications

There are many legal implications regarding services provided to special education students. Paraprofessionals have made it possible for many schools and districts to meet the requirements of the law regarding special education.

Access to an education is a student's right and can provide that student with many opportunities. Conversely, a lack of access to an education may seriously limit the quality of life and potential success of an individual. A number of judicial decisions have highlighted the importance of this right for students with disabilities. Congress has incorporated this concept in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law refers to the right to an education using the terminology, Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Free appropriate public education means that state and local schools

are required to provide educational and related services to students with disabilities without charging the students or their parents. Schools cannot refuse to provide an education because of the increased costs involved in educating a student with a disability. The concept further means that education must meet state standards and be based on the individual needs of the student. Paraprofessionals are instrumental in this process.

Federal and state regulations require that schools provide various special education programs to meet the needs of all students with disabilities. "In its goals, scope, and implementation, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142, November 29, 1975) is the American Magna Carta for the people it liberates" (Kaplan, 1987, p.2).

States have also stepped forward in the education of the disabled student. Beginning in the 1970's, state officials developed laws and created other policies that would not have been conceived a decade earlier. Congressional actions over the last two decades have initiated full and equal participation in all aspects of life for those with disabilities.

Public Law 93-112, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Public Law 94-42, the Education of all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, with their reauthorization and amendments, and the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guarantee access to appropriate public education, post-secondary education, employment, and community activities that individuals require for optimal growth and participation in society (Blalock, 1991, p.202).



The intent of this legislation was to provide programs that meet the individual needs of students with disabilities, rather than to place children based only on the existence of available programs. A second element of this legislation was to provide the least restrictive environment to every disabled student. This suggests that a child should be educated in an environment as much like the regular educational program as possible. The interest of the child is best met by finding a level of service that meets the individual student's needs, but is not too restrictive. In order to meet all of these individual needs, school districts were required to enhance their services. Many districts did this by hiring paraprofessionals.

#### Why Paraprofessional Roles Were Created

The role of paraprofessionals as instructional assistants in American public schools is a relatively new concept, although paraprofessionals themselves have been in the schools for years performing other clerical-type duties. As the paraprofessional role was transforming, the number of paraprofessionals in schools was growing. In 1965, it was estimated that there were fewer than 10,000 paraprofessionals working in schools (Pickett, 1986). However, a survey of chief school officers conducted in 1999 by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals indicated that there were now more than 500,000 full-time equivalent paraprofessionals across the country (Pickett 1999). As the roles were changing from clerical, record-keeping type tasks to participation in the instructional assistance process, the number of paraprofessionals in schools was also rapidly increasing.

There were several reasons why roles were created for paraprofessionals. The

efforts of the mid and late 1960's were developed around the recognition of several factors: the nation sorely needed more workers in the human-services fields, (health, education, and welfare); there were millions of people who could work effectively in these fields, if they had access to necessary training and academic credentials; and it was possible to differentiate the tasks of the various jobs and separate them into categories, some which could be carried out by full professionals, and others by paraprofessionals. While paraprofessionals were to be performing their tasks, they were also to be trained for professional positions. The paraprofessionals would also be performing functions that society and consumers badly needed. This utilization and training of paraprofessionals would improve the quality of educational, health, and social services for the general public (Pickett, 1984).

#### The Role of the Paraprofessional in Education

As early as 1933, Trimble analyzed the duties of high school teachers and identified 14 categories determined to be completely unrelated to teaching; e.g., cleaning, monitoring hallways, running machinery, completing forms, and inventorying textbooks. He stated that the skills of educators would be better utilized if the teachers were allowed to concentrate on duties requiring their professional training (Trimble, 1933).

Paraprofessionals allowed teachers to do just that. They became an important and dynamic role in providing educational opportunities to students and in making school more efficient and effective. As schools' efforts continued to progress and grow, so did the role of the paraprofessional. Models, such as the inclusion of all students with disabilities into the regular classroom, required additional support, and in many cases,

additional staff members. The utilization of paraprofessionals in the classrooms allowed for expanded learning opportunities for students.

Twenty years ago, Dr. Stan Vasa noted that the roles of paraprofessional were changing. Many paraprofessionals were experiencing expanded expectations and duties as well as a variety of different educational settings (Vasa, 1980).

While various reports from throughout the field showed that roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals were expanding in all areas of the human services, they also indicated that opportunities for training, career advancement, mobility, and continuing education were not expanding at the same rate (Pickett 1984). Despite major efforts to establish career ladders over the last two decades, few exist. Shortages in paraprofessionals were caused by (a) low wages, (b) lack of career mobility, (c) burnout created by insufficient back-up resources and lack of support personnel, and (d) geographic isolation (Vasa, 1980).

### Moral and Ethical Issues for Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals are employees in school districts. They hold positions of authority over the students and are held to moral and ethical standards. The Council of Exceptional Children developed a code of ethics and standards for professional practices in 1983. The document outlines the minimal standards in regards to ethics for those members of the special education profession. Paraprofessionals who work with special education students are members of the profession and are expected to comply with the appropriate standards.

Confidentiality is a key issue. Paraprofessionals handle confidential material on a

daily basis, as well as handle situations with moral and ethical dimensions, so it is imperative that they be exposed to the appropriate ethical guidelines. Both federal and state laws regulate access to information about students with disabilities. The Family Rights and Privacy Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act address the rights of the students and their parents in regards to privacy. Paraprofessionals who have access to records and information must understand their legal and ethical responsibility for the confidentiality of such materials.

As a school employee, the paraprofessional should view him/herself as a student advocate and an advocate for the student's parents. All children have the right to a free and appropriate education. These rights have been established by legislation and through the courts. As an employee of the school and students' advocate, it is the paraprofessional's obligation to make sure that all students are receiving such an education (Steckelberg and Vasa, 1988).

Paraprofessionals will frequently address situations where a student's interest may be different than his/her own. If the paraprofessional is not trained effectively, it is possible that the paraprofessional could become too involved with the student and the family. Ethical standards have been established to assist those who provide service to students with disabilities with the correct course of action. Ethical guidelines for paraprofessionals include broad areas covering specific topics as: accepting responsibilities, relating to students and parents, relating to the teacher and the school (Vasa et al., 1982). All educators and employees that work with special education students must understand the ethical implications of the decisions they make. They must also understand the possible

impact they may have on the students, parents, and staff with whom they work. Students have limited influence, which often makes them vulnerable. Students rely on the authority of the paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators to protect them and their interests.

The paraprofessional must understand the moral and ethical responsibilities that accompany their positions. They are members of a team. They work directly with teachers, students, parents, and other community members. The ethical behavior of the paraprofessional can be a major factor in his or her effectiveness (Vasa et al., 1982).

### **Defining the Paraprofessional Role**

Various factors influencing the specific responsibilities assigned to paraprofessionals include: characteristics and personalities of the teacher, paraprofessional and student; interpersonal skills of both the teacher and paraprofessional; skill level of the paraprofessional; and the physical environment of the classroom. Individual teachers may vary the responsibilities of the paraprofessional to enhance the program of instruction.

The following list gives instructional and administrative duties that could be assigned to the paraprofessionals:

1. Assist individual students in performing activities initiated by the teachers.
2. Supervise children in the hallway, lunchroom, and playground.
3. Assist in monitoring supplementary work and independent study.
4. Reinforce learning in small groups or with individuals, while the teacher works with other students.
5. Provide assistance with individualized-programmed materials.
6. Score objective tests and papers and maintain appropriate records for teachers.

7. Perform clerical tasks, such as typing and duplicating.
8. Assist the teacher in observing, recording, and charting behavior.
9. Assist the teacher with crisis problems and behavior management.
10. Assist in preparation and production of instructional materials.
11. Carry out instructional programs designed by the teacher.
12. Work with the teacher to develop classroom schedules.
13. Carry out tutoring activities designed by the teacher.

(Pickett et al., 1993).

A paraprofessional can also supply: additional positive role models for students, improved student learning opportunities, increased individualized instruction, added individual attention to students, additional planning time for teachers, consistency in delivery of instruction, and improved monitoring and evaluation of students' educational progress.

Additional benefits that may result from the use of paraprofessionals include: improved pupil self-concept, increased positive pupil attitudes toward learning and school, increased appropriate student behaviors in the classroom, improved teacher morale, improved parent-school relations, improved educator interpersonal and management skills, and increased involvement and understanding of the community within the educational process (Vasa, 1980). Role Delineation

A clear delineation of the teacher's and paraprofessional's roles is an important element of a successful program. Identification of the different roles assists in adherence to ethical and legal requirements and serves as a guide in supervision and evaluation.

Because there is a variety of levels of knowledge and expertise among the paraprofessionals and because expectations of the classroom teachers differ, communication between teachers and paraprofessionals is essential in a successful program.

Nationwide efforts are under way to improve the effectiveness of our schools. One method of this effort is to empower teachers and to enhance the status of the teaching profession. Teachers are both instructors and educational managers. With these positions come increased responsibility and accountability for determining educational priorities, developing and evaluating curriculum content, and conferring with colleagues and parents to determine how best to organize schools and to allocate resources. As teachers spend more time on these expanded duties, less time is available for direct instruction. To take on these new, more intricate duties successfully, teachers require assistance and support from many sources. One of the most important, yet under-recognized, resources available to teachers is the paraprofessional (Pickett et al., 1993).

In order for teachers and paraprofessionals to work together to meet the needs of all students, clearly defined roles must be established.

### The Role of the Classroom Teacher

In far too many cases, teachers are unprepared to direct paraprofessionals. The teachers may also lack in the time and resources needed for providing the training for the paraprofessional. Teachers may be unaware of how to assess the potential for even greater use of a paraprofessional in order to provide increased instructional services. Teachers are often troubled because they are unsure of what roles can be assigned to paraprofessionals

and are uncomfortable directing and delegating responsibilities to an adult (Boomer, 1980). In many instances, the teachers are also uncomfortable and unsure how to evaluate the paraprofessionals' performance. The effective use of paraprofessionals relies on a collaborative approach, in which administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals must combine efforts to best serve the needs of their students (Pickett et al., 1993). In order for this approach to be properly implemented, roles must be outlined and defined.

The teacher's role is (a) assessing the student's entry level performance, (b) planning instruction for individual students, (c) implementing the goals and objectives of the individualized educational plan, (d) supervising and coordinating work of paraprofessionals and other support staff, (e) evaluating and reporting student progress, (f) involving parents in their children's education, and (g) coordinating and managing information provided by other professionals (Steckelberg and Vasa, 1986).

Teachers also have a number of roles to fulfill in the proper utilization of the paraprofessionals in the classroom. Heller and Pickett (1982) outlined specific teacher roles and responsibilities for managing paraprofessionals.

The specific roles and responsibilities are (a) model professionalism in day to day activities, (b) establish acceptable job performance criteria for the paraprofessional at the beginning of the school year, (c) provide frequent input to assist the paraprofessional in improving skills, (d) share information relative to the needs of each student with the paraprofessional, (e) design and relate the paraprofessional's role in behavior management, (f) create a process in which the paraprofessional responsibilities facilitate the teacher's ability to provide an improved amount of direct student instruction, and (g) assist the



paraprofessional in understanding his/her position as an authority figure (Steckelberg and Vasa, 1998).

Teachers must be provided with methods and techniques to assist them in delegating responsibilities to paraprofessionals. Elements of this process include techniques for confronting conflicts between the teacher and paraprofessional, the developing of positive leadership skills, and defining roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional (Pickett, 1990).

Teachers who work with paraprofessionals for the first time must identify criteria for supervising and evaluating paraprofessionals. Delegating responsibilities to paraprofessionals and developing a criteria for evaluating and supervising the paraprofessional's performance becomes an added task in the job description of the special education teacher (Pickett, 1990).

Paraprofessionals play an important and dynamic role in the education process. It is essential that there are clear and definite roles set out for each of their positions. There are legal and ethical issues as well as role delineation and supervising teacher relationships to consider. To facilitate an effective and productive paraprofessional position, it is essential that classroom teachers understand and are capable of implementing their crucial role.

### **Training of Paraprofessionals**

Training is done with the desired result of improved production or improved delivery of services. If employees are expected to perform specific duties or improve their production, the training needs to be a method specifically designed to provide the

employee with the skills to make that improvement.

### Training Issues

Most of the research available on the topic of training for paraprofessionals indicates that training is both beneficial and recommended (Jones & Bender, 1993; Pickett et al., 1993). Unfortunately, it does not happen very often. There are currently 500,000 paraprofessionals in the nation's schools and yet 70% to 80% received no prior training (Haselkorn & Fiedler, 1996). Once the paraprofessional has been selected, school districts should provide him or her with ongoing opportunities for professional development. The overwhelming majority of paraprofessionals hired have had no training in teaching. If paraprofessionals are to be used effectively, they must receive training in the specific areas in which they will be working. It is a pro-active idea to provide paraprofessionals access to any staff development activity that will enable them to become more effective.

Although most instructional paraprofessionals have had little academic training, many have an abundance of knowledge about their students because they interact and participate with them in the community. This interaction with students and their families enables the paraprofessionals to have a holistic and informed perspective that can be essential in assisting students both academically and socially (Pigford & Hale, 1995).

The role of paraprofessional personnel has seen significant changes over the years (Blalock, 1991), with an increasing emphasis on the instruction of students. It has been suggested (Steckelberg & Vasa, 1986) that up to 80% of a paraprofessional's time may be spent in the instruction of students, and yet typically, minimal training has been required of, or provided in this area (Frith & Lindsey, 1982). Hofmeister (1993) referred to

paraprofessional training approaches used as a developing system. He expressed concern over the increasing numbers of paraprofessionals who are untrained and who work with students on a daily basis.

The need for adequate training for paraprofessionals has been recognized for many years. As early as the 1970's, some states (e.g. Vermont, Florida, Kansas, Nebraska) were mandating credentialing and training procedures. In 1991 the United States Congress, (as cited in Striffler, 1993) recognized paraprofessionals' importance and the need for training. Increased levels of training have raised issues of differentiated compensation, and have given rise to the establishment of career ladders for paraprofessionals in some states.

#### Lack of Training

Frith and Mims (1985) suggested that paraprofessionals might experience similar burnout symptoms, as do most professionals who suffer from burnout due to a lack of training and limited opportunities for advancement. This may be due to the fact that many of the paraprofessionals are placed in positions with little or no training. A survey conducted in 1981 found training programs for paraprofessionals to be virtually non-existent (Frith and Mims, 1985). Discontent is evident, as shown in the high turnover rate of paraprofessionals nationwide. The results of the Passaro et al. (1994) study support the notion that a major factor contributing to dissatisfaction among paraprofessionals is lack of career advancement. Such opportunities may arise from training and credentialing procedures.

Logue (1992) suggested that failure to evaluate retention factors of paraprofessionals could have expensive ramifications and could be a vital mistake to

education systems. In his study, Logue identified a total of 32 training programs within 18 states. There was no obvious geographical or demographic pattern in the distribution of the states where training was implemented. Special education was the most noted group for whom the training was offered (10 programs), followed by English as a Second Language (4), instructional or teacher's aides (4), and a general category of professionals/paraprofessionals (6). Other targeted audiences included vocational or rural education, early childhood programs, Title 1, and inclusionary settings (Logue, 1992; Morgan, 1995). The most frequently cited training topic related to roles and responsibilities (80%), followed by monitoring, assessment and evaluation (69%), teaming and collaboration (64%), instruction (64%), and management of behavior (64%) (Morgan, 1995).

### Training Topics

The lack of consensus over training topics could be considered a symptom of confusion in the field of paraprofessional training. Paraprofessional roles differ so widely that no single training program or list of topics could meet the needs of all paraprofessionals. Morgan and Ashbaker (1994) indicated that even within special education training programs, there was no absolute consensus as to desired training topics. The roles and requirements vary both in job descriptions and local mandates. From a list of almost 40 training topics mentioned, the most frequently identified were behavior management, monitoring, assessment, and evaluation (Morgan, 1995).

### Training Methods

There are two methods of providing training for paraprofessionals. They are "in-

service training” and “on-the-job training”. Whichever method is used, both teachers and paraprofessionals should be involved in designing the program and in attending the training. This type of involvement results in more relevant training topics, and adds to improved job satisfaction, morale, and the desire to improve skills. The jobs that paraprofessionals fill in schools are diverse. For example, one person may assist in an elementary classroom, while another is assigned to work with a student who has severe behavior problems. To be most beneficial, training should be designed to match the duties of the position. The training should also cover a set of general competencies. Despite the diversity in paraprofessionals’ positions, there are some competencies that are needed by all paraprofessionals. Ideally, training should begin with the paraprofessional’s orientation to the school system (Pickett et al., 1993).

### Career Development

Pickett (1990) reported that the major tasks that must be addressed by administrators in order to develop a comprehensive plan of career development for paraprofessionals include:

1. Developing a process and content that are relevant to the identified training needs of paraprofessionals employed by the district;
2. Insuring that selected training activities and strategies recognize the unique characteristics of adult learners;
3. Developing permanent mechanisms for delivering the different components of a district wide training program.

To ensure positive results, provisions should be established to provide knowledge

and skills that are needed to work with special needs students. All components of training should be related and should include structured on-the-job coaching with formal in-service training (Pickett, 1990).

Effective integration of paraprofessionals into classrooms requires cooperation among administrators and practitioners at the district and building levels. Ideally, district-wide policies should define the roles of paraprofessionals, set competencies for employment, and create opportunities for career development and training. When this does not occur, teachers and paraprofessionals must find their own methods to understand, recognize, and value the contributions of others. Training is a crucial element in the effective use of paraprofessionals. Such training protects students, improves instructional delivery, and encourages compliance with policies and regulations. Paraprofessionals need to possess both skills and discretion to be effective. The school district and the supervising teacher share responsibility for the paraprofessional's training. Supervisors must make sure to only assign duties for which paraprofessionals have had training and for which they have the appropriate skills (Pickett et al., 1993).

The effects of paraprofessional staff on student learning are likely to depend on whether the paraprofessionals are used to bring about reforms in instructional practice. Kennedy & Birman (1986) found both positive and negative effects from using paraprofessionals in the classroom. The potential for negative effects occurred when instruction from the regular certified teacher was replaced by instruction from a less qualified paraprofessional. This happened in some Chapter I pullout and replacement programs (Kennedy & Birman, 1986). However, positive scientific evaluations exist for a

number of programs that use qualified auxiliary staff as remedial adult tutors in carefully coordinated activities. In these instances, the paraprofessional added to the total instructional time provided by the regular teacher (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989). Thus, paraprofessional assistance can be expected to deliver impressive contributions to the learning of students in specific situations when the paraprofessional is working in a program that reforms current instructional practices to increase the time, intensity, consistency, and quality of the basic skills (McPartland & Fessler, 1992).

The training of paraprofessionals emerged as an issue in a qualitative study on inclusion (Goessling, 1998). While questioning paraprofessionals' perceptions on inclusion, the issue of paraprofessional training and support continued to surface. During their one-on-one interviews with the researcher, the paraprofessionals continually reverted back to their concerns regarding their work duties and their lack of training. Regardless of the interviewers' attempts to focus on the issue of inclusion, the paraprofessionals kept going back to the issue of training.

Training should also be done to improve the relationships of teachers and paraprofessionals. In many cases, teachers assume that the paraprofessionals know their duties, while the paraprofessionals may be waiting for instructions. In these situations, both adults leave at the end of the day feeling frustrated. Because job satisfaction has been found to link strongly with one's relationship to one's partner (Saren, 1986), satisfaction in the teacher/paraprofessional relationships without proper training is likely to be low.

In summary, paraprofessionals need training to learn the tasks they are expected to

perform. Many have had limited or no training in education. Training must also be done to foster teacher/paraprofessional relationships. Both the teacher and the paraprofessional need to be trained in how to make their relationship and performance the most productive in servicing students. Identifying the areas where training could make the greatest impact and where there is the greatest desire is often the key.

### Training Needs

Which training needs are “actual” and which training needs are “perceived” is an important element that administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals need to address to ensure that their efforts are making a positive impact where it is needed. This section will discuss both the perceived and actual training needs of paraprofessionals.

Perceived needs are those needs that individuals believe they have. Perceived needs, although not always the same as actual needs, are of considerable value because people who believe that their knowledge, skills, or performance abilities are weak in certain areas may lack the confidence to perform well in those areas. Thus, whether perceived needs are real or imagined, they represent opportunities for continuing education.

Identifying perceived training needs is not a new concept, but it is an underutilized one that has the potential to revolutionize the paraprofessional training process.

Identifying specific needs is an element of a comprehensive needs assessment. Vella (1994) suggested that needs assessments can be the key to adult learning. “Without it, there is no honest defining of learning needs, no dialogue, no listening” (Vella, 1994, p. 45).



A needs assessment is defined as a decision-making process that provides information about the necessity and feasibility of an educational intervention. In the broadest terms, a need is a discrepancy between an existing set of circumstances and some desired set of circumstances (Knox, 1965). Some experts use the term “real needs” to describe the discrepancies between optimal and actual circumstances. Educational needs as defined by potential learners are called “felt needs” (Atwood & Ellis, 1971).

Properly utilized, needs assessments provide solid data on which to base decisions regarding program content, delivery mode, and audience. A needs assessment is also essential for the promotion and scheduling of programs (Queeney, 1995).

One component of a comprehensive needs assessment is the use of a self-reported questionnaire, which could be used to determine specific perceived needs of individuals. Self-reports that are used in needs assessments are responses to inquiries regarding individuals’ perceptions of their learning needs.

“Self-reports are particularly appropriate as a first step in identifying needs when a researcher seeks broad, general perceptions of needs” (Queeney, 1995, p. 118).

The primary disadvantage of self-reporting or perception of needs is that it is a product of individuals’ limited awareness and understanding of their own needs. In considering their educational needs, people are prone to cite areas of new knowledge. As Nowlen (1988) suggests, people often are comfortable reporting that their knowledge and skills may need updating, but usually are less comfortable admitting that discrepancies between their behavior and that which is desirable exist in areas related to their past learning or to regularly performed activities.

To overcome some of the shortcomings of self-reporting questionnaires, a number of specific questions can guide respondents to consider relevant factors rather than simply offer quick answers without much thought. Often, unless particular areas are pointed out to them, people simply do not think of them (Queeney, 1995). Queeney suggests that, “the use of specific questions can make the difference between obtaining a list of casual interests and a list of perceived needs” (p.120).

Although there are many potential means to determine training needs, some educators believe that a need is a need only when it is recognized by the potential learner as a need (Monette, 1977).

When practitioners’ perceptions of need and usefulness are accommodated, successful outcomes are more likely to occur (Woolfolk, Lang, Farghaly, Ziemiechi, & Faja, 1991, p. 223).

Morgan and Ashbaker (1994) recommended that further research be undertaken into both the efficacy of current programs, and the perceived needs of paraprofessionals. Similar studies conducted by Passaro et al. (1994), French and Cabell (1993), and Vasa et al. (1982) analyzed the current training trends and the perceived training needs for paraprofessionals. The first two studies were conducted in the Midwest, and the latter by Vasa et al. (1982) was conducted in Nebraska.

#### **Research on Paraprofessional’s Training and Needs**

There have been studies conducted similar to the study proposed in Chapter 1 that compare the current and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals by school administrators, special education teachers and by the paraprofessional themselves (Vasa et

al., 1982; French & Cabell, 1993; and Passaro et al., 1994).

Vasa, Steckelberg and Ronning (1982)

A 1982 study completed in Nebraska (Vasa et al., 1982) was conducted to collect paraprofessional training data so that it could be analyzed and used to improve educational services for handicapped students in Nebraska. Vasa et al. (1982), surveyed building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals across Nebraska. Contacts were made and surveys were distributed via the Educational Service Units (ESUs) throughout the state. The predominant practices and perceived needs in special education and paraprofessional training were examined. The study provided a wealth of information that suggested that special education paraprofessionals were widely used, but that little attention was paid to selection criteria or preparation before employment. Information was collected in reference to special education teachers and paraprofessionals in Nebraska. Much of this information was related to fiscal matters that are not relevant to this study.

In 1982, the majority of the building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals participating in the study agreed that the training guidelines for paraprofessionals should be mandated at the local level. Seventy-nine percent of the building administrators felt that training guidelines should be mandated locally, while 76% of the special educators and 78% of the paraprofessionals felt the same. The groups also had a majority consensus that no specific criteria or certification should be required in order for paraprofessionals to be employed. Of the three groups, 50% of the building administrators, 48% of the special education teachers, and 29% of the paraprofessionals

revealed that they did have some type of formal job description for the paraprofessionals in their school.

Regarding training, the majority of respondents indicated that no training was provided to new paraprofessionals and also stated that no on-going training was provided to those who maintained employment as paraprofessionals.

When comparing perceived training needs to the current training practices, all three groups disclosed that the amount of perceived training needed was greater than the current level of practice. The results were significant at the .05 level. There were also 11 training areas recognized as need topics. They were (a) school policy, (b) legal and ethical issues, (c) job role expectations, (d) knowledge of handicaps, (e) behavioral/physical control, (f) tutoring techniques, (g) observing, (h) recording and reporting student behavior, (i) instructional materials, (j) equipment operation, (k) first aid/safety, and (l) job specific skills.

Training for teachers who work with and supervise paraprofessionals was another aspect of Vasa et al. (1982) study. The researchers discovered that only 14% of the special education teachers participating in the study received pre-service training in areas relating to working with and supervising paraprofessionals. The need was recognized by 52% of the building administrators, 82% of the special education teachers, and 60% of the paraprofessionals who were surveyed. Ninety-two percent of the building administrators, 90% of the special education teachers, and 82% of the paraprofessionals also expressed a need for special education teachers to be trained by the district in the supervision and evaluation of paraprofessionals. The data and information gathered in the study was

valuable at the time. The information assisted Vasa et al. (1982) and others in making several recommendations in regard to the training of paraprofessionals in Nebraska.

French and Cabell (1993)

French and Cabell (1993) conducted a similar study in Colorado. In this study they examined the perceptions of selected K-12 school personnel, (specifically special education directors, personnel directors and special education teachers), regarding current employment conditions and needs of the paraprofessionals throughout Colorado. The paraprofessionals themselves were not surveyed in this study. The survey was designed to reflect the current policies and utilization of paraprofessionals, as well as model, content, and training implementation. The respondents were divided into two groups, rural and urban. The majority of the urban special education directors indicated that some form of in-service training was offered to paraprofessionals, but admitted that in-service training was sporadic and that it depended on the amount of time and money the district had available. Three of the four rural school districts surveyed indicated that no training was available to the paraprofessionals in their districts. There was a nearly unanimous rejection to having a required associate degree or training as a prerequisite for being hired as a paraprofessional. Personnel directors felt insistent that training should occur after employment and be delivered within the district-by-district personnel.

The preferred training results from all respondents indicated the need for specific training based on the paraprofessional's roles and their specific job duties. This method of training was preferred over other types of course work or in-services, which are similar to teacher education programs. Urban respondents favored specific training and identified

that the roles and duties of the urban paraprofessionals were more distinct. The rural respondents requested more generic training, as their duties were conveyed by the study as broader and more general.

The survey discovered the following topics as most appropriate for training (a) behavior and classroom management, (b) appropriate role of the paraprofessional, (c) learning theory, (d) child growth and development, (e) health and safety procedures, (f) instructional techniques, (g) tutoring in basic skills, and (h) handicapping conditions. All three-group participants in this survey expressed the need for systematic training and the need for flexible convenient training.

Passaro, Pickett, Latham, and HongBo (1994)

Passaro et al. (1994) conducted a study in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. They used the Delphi method to develop a survey using a panel of professionals in cycles of evaluations and revisions that resulted in a consensus of questions. The surveys were mailed to paraprofessionals, special education teachers, related service professionals, and administrators. A survey was mailed to a random sample of at least 10% of the special education paraprofessionals in all three states. Over 1000 surveys were mailed. There were two parallel surveys so that comparisons could be made between paraprofessional self-reported competencies and the teachers' and administrators' perceived paraprofessional competency.

Fifty-two percent of the paraprofessional surveys were returned. Forty-one percent of the teachers and administrator surveys were returned, for a 46% total overall return rate. The results indicated that 96% of the paraprofessionals were female, with an

average age of 43. The average education level was 13.5 years. Seventy-five percent were in instructional settings. Of the teachers and administrators, 48% felt that there was a state shortage of paraprofessionals and 25% felt that there was a high turnover rate.

Of the paraprofessionals asked, 55% stated they received formal evaluations and more than half felt that they had adequate supervision on the job. Sixteen percent of those paraprofessionals surveyed reported no training at all. On-the-job training was the most frequent type of training used in two of the states involved in the study and the least common type used in the third state. Other types of training included local and statein-services and two and four year college educational programs.

The study inquired about adequacy of prior training. Fifty percent of the paraprofessionals in North Dakota, 84% in Wyoming, and 38% in South Dakota indicated that their training was adequate. Areas of further training requested were: behavior management, understanding students with special needs, rights of students with special needs, role of the paraprofessional, health and safety, and participation with the IEP. Of those paraprofessionals completing the survey, 96% said they would attend training if made available.

When comparing the results of the paraprofessional survey with the results of teachers and supervisors, several findings were interesting. Eighty-five percent of the paraprofessionals felt competent to implement behavior programs. Their supervisors were less convinced. Only 70% of the supervisors thought that the paraprofessionals were competent to implement behavior programs. In contrast, the percentage of supervisors that thought paraprofessionals were competent to prompt in reading exercises (78%) was

greater than the percentage of paraprofessionals who believed themselves to be competent in this area (42%).

The recommendations from this study included having districts (specifically rural districts) initiate surveys and needs assessments to identify training topics. The study specifically recommended conferences, on-site workshops, television or satellite teleconferencing, training from institutions of higher education, and information packages, as appropriate training methods. They also recommended initiating a career ladder or incentive program to retain the existing paraprofessionals.

In the above-mentioned studies, there are several commonalities. For example, they all indicated a need for additional training. There does seem to be some discrepancy between the responses of the administrators, supervising teachers, and paraprofessionals in competencies and training needs. All studies agreed that paraprofessionals need additional training.

### Summary

The role of the paraprofessional has transformed dramatically from its inception in the early 1900's. Paraprofessionals were initially cleaners and monitors; over the years their duties have changed and developed. Since 1957, the literature lends support to the usefulness and benefits of paraprofessionals in education (Cruickshank & Haring, 1957). Whether used in a one-on-one situation or in a group process, trained paraprofessionals have had a direct impact on the quality of service given to children. Paraprofessionals not only relieve the teacher from varied daily, menial tasks, but also have an impact on student learning (Fafard, 1977).



Quality instruction is an essential ingredient to promote the successful exchange of ideas and to inspire the desire to learn. There is an overwhelming consensus among educators and policy makers alike that a vital component of quality instruction is a well-qualified, well-trained instructional staff. Paraprofessionals are now an element of that staff. However, they are often providing direct instruction to students with little or no training. Gartner et al. (1977) indicated that the use of paraprofessionals has resulted in student gains; the use of paraprofessionals results in increased children's reading scores, increased verbalization skills, and more student interaction. A well-trained and qualified paraprofessional can increase student learning.

As changes occurred in regard to the education of students with handicaps, paraprofessionals began to be hired into special education programs. With the legal requirements and demands for individualized instruction, paraprofessionals assisted special educators in meeting the individual needs of their students and in meeting legal requirements.

As the roles and duties of the paraprofessionals increased, the training procedures remained the same, very minimal. The majority of paraprofessionals were hired with little or no training and were often untrained prior to being placed on the job. The teachers working with and supervising the paraprofessionals were also often untrained and unprepared in handling the paraprofessionals' unique situations. This remains true today. Paraprofessionals need to be trained, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires such training.

There is a lack of recent literature in the area of paraprofessional training and those

studies comparing current training practices and perceived training needs. There is also limited literature to attempt to support or discredit the need for additional training of paraprofessionals (Passaro et al., 1994). One of the most current comprehensive studies involving paraprofessional training in Nebraska was by Vasa et al. (1982). This lack of current information demonstrates the need for additional research of paraprofessional training in the State of Nebraska.

The intent of this study was to analyze the current training practices and the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals, as viewed by paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and building administrators who work with special education students in the State of Nebraska.

## CHAPTER 3

### Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by principals/assistant principals, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals.

#### Design

The questionnaire/survey method was the design used in this study. It enabled sizeable quantities of information to be collected from large groups of people. The data were collected, summarized, and reported effectively using the questionnaire/survey design because it was easily administered to large groups of people with minimal requirements (Fowler, 1988; Queeney, 1995). The purpose of this study was to collect information from selected groups of participants working with special education students

#### Population and Sample

The sampling design used in this study was multi-stage (Babbie, 1990). The population for this study was comprised of public school building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska. All of the districts that have representatives in the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors as of 20000, were solicited to have their district participate in the study through an initial request letter (see Appendix F). Names and addresses of the directors/supervisors were obtained from the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors. Only those districts that agreed to participate received

surveys. The special education directors/supervisors distributed and collected copies of the survey instrument. It is assumed that all building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in participating districts received questionnaires from the special education director/supervisor.

### Questionnaire Development

The questionnaires were developed from the Vasa et al. (1982) questionnaire that examined paraprofessional use in Nebraska. The original development of that survey instrument was achieved through a systematic process. Initially, the literature on the utilization of paraprofessionals in special education was reviewed. Following the review, preliminary survey questions were developed and critiqued for each of the three groups: building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. A separate survey form was then designed for each of the groups. The questionnaires were reviewed by an advisory committee consisting of: Nebraska Department of Education personnel, education service unit administrators, local school administrators, and special education teachers (see Appendix G). The advisory committee provided feedback on the topics covered, the appropriateness of specific questions, question design, and survey layout. This feedback was then incorporated into the final survey forms (Vasa et al., 1982).

Through consultation with Dr. Vasa, revisions were made to the original questionnaires for this study. These revisions consisted of updating terminology and modernizing the format, as well as selecting questions that were appropriate to this study. Minimal changes were made to the original questions so that comparisons could be conducted between the two studies. Separate, color-coded questionnaires were used for

building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. Each questionnaire was written to be appropriate for each group of subjects, but all questionnaires contained similar questions (see Appendixes H, I, J).

### Procedures

The names of the special education directors/supervisors were obtained from the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors. Initial contacts were made through a mailing to the special education directors/supervisors who belong to the association. Those districts willing to participate in the study were sent the appropriate number of questionnaires for building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals that work with special education students. The surveys were color-coded. The special education director/supervisor in the participating districts distributed the materials to the building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in his/her school district. Subjects were asked to return the questionnaire within one week after receiving it to the special education administrator/supervisor who distributed it. Upon collection of all questionnaires from the participants, the special education director/supervisor sent the materials to the investigator via a pre-paid mailer. Follow-up phone calls were used if questionnaires were not returned from a school within 5 weeks following distribution to the district.

### Response Rate

The findings of the study were based on data collected from a questionnaire. The questionnaires used in this study were based on the Vasa et al. (1982) questionnaire that examined paraprofessional use and training in Nebraska. Names and addresses of the

special education directors/supervisors were obtained from the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors (NASES). Seventy-two directors and supervisors were sent an initial request letter on March 2, 2000. Of the 72 requests, 55 responded that they would be willing to have their district participate, providing a return rate of 73%. Those NASES members who failed to respond to the initial request letter were contacted a second time via e-mail and were again requested to participate in the study. No additional districts volunteered to participate after a second request.

Members of the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors willing to have their district participate in the study completed a form that indicated how many questionnaires they would need for each of the three groups: building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. The appropriate number of surveys were then sent out to the participating NASES members for completion. The NASES members were given 3 weeks to distribute and collect the questionnaires from their personnel. They then returned the completed questionnaires in an enclosed pre-paid mailer. Those members failing to return the surveys within 4 weeks were sent a reminder notice. Three large school districts were contacted individually about participating in the study.

Of the 1,904 questionnaires mailed to the participating districts, 1,056 were completed and returned in the pre-paid mailer, for an overall 55% return rate. Two hundred fifty-four building principal surveys were distributed and 127 were completed for a 50% return rate. Of the 740 surveys distributed to special education teachers, 413 were completed and returned for a 56% return rate. Of the 910 paraprofessional surveys

distributed, 516 were returned for a 57% return rate.

### Demographic Data

Of the 1,056 people surveyed, 88% were female and 12% were male. Of the 122 males, 64% were building principals and assistant principals, 27% were special education teachers, and 9% were paraprofessionals. Of the females participating in the study, 5% were building administrators, 41% were special education teachers and 54% were paraprofessionals.

The type of institution in which the respondents were employed also varied. Four percent were working in preschools, 48% in an elementary setting, 33% at the secondary level and 15% indicated they worked in a K-12 environment.

All of the three groups participating in the study felt that paraprofessionals who work in special education programs improve student learning. It is worthy of mention that, even though all groups strongly believe that paraprofessionals improve student learning, they also felt uninformed regarding paraprofessional training.

The years of experience in the position varied amongst the groups. Of the principals participating in the study, 30% had two or less years of experience, 20% had between 3 and 5 years of experience, 10% had between 6 and 8 years of experience, 9% had between 9 and 12 years of experience, while 31% of the principals had more than 12 years of experience. The special education teachers' years of experience also varied; 15% had two or less years of experience, 16% had between 3 and 5 of years experience, 13% had between 6 and 8 years of experience, 12% had between 9 and 12 of years of experience, while 44% of the special education teachers had more than 12 years of

experience. The paraprofessionals had less years of experience than the principals and special education teachers, with 36% having 2 or less years of experience, 26% had between 3 and 5 years of experience, 13% had between 6 and 8 years of experience, 12% had between 9 and 12 years of experience, while 13% of the paraprofessionals had more than 12 years of experience. Communication with these three districts went through their research office prior to distribution and collection of questionnaires.

### Data Analysis

Responses to the survey items were compiled and analyzed with respect to the research questions identified in Chapter One.

1. What are the current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska? Descriptive statistics including frequency distributions were used to analyze the current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska.

2. What are the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as viewed by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska? Descriptive statistics including frequency distributions were used to analyze perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska.

3. What are the differences in perceptions about current training practices and



perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as viewed by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals? Two-way ANOVAS were run to analyze what differences existed between the current training practices and the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals and to determine what differences existed across the positions of building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. Due to the multiple two-way ANOVAS that were run, an alpha level of .01 was used for each ANOVA in order to help control for type I errors, while still providing adequate statistical power.

4. What changes have occurred in current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska since 1982? Descriptive statistics were used to compare the results of this study to the results of the Vasa et al. (1982) study.

#### Summary

The purposes of this study were to determine (a) the current training practices for paraprofessionals as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals in special education programs in the state of Nebraska, (b) the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals, as viewed by building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, (c) the differences that exist between current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals and the differences that exist in perceptions of building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, and (d) the changes that have occurred in training practices since 1982.

To answer these questions, districts that had representatives in the Nebraska Association of Special Education Administrators/ Supervisors, were solicited to have their districts complete the questionnaires. The data collected from the survey of building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals were analyzed using descriptive statistics and two-way ANOVAS. The findings from these data analyses are discussed in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results and Interpretation

The purposes of this study were to determine (a) the current training practices for paraprofessionals as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals in special education programs in the state of Nebraska, (b) the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals, as viewed by building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, (c) the differences that exist between current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals and the differences that exist in perceptions of building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, and (d) the changes that have occurred in training practices since 1982.

#### Research Questions

The specific research questions for this study were:

1. What are the current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?
2. What are the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?
3. What are the differences in perceptions about current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in

the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

4. What changes have occurred in current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska since 1982?

### Findings of the Study

In order to clarify the results of the responses to the questionnaires, the data were analyzed and displayed with respect to the initial four research questions.

#### Research Question One

What are the current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

To determine what training currently exists, the survey responses were reviewed in regard to the approximate amount of clock hours of formal training/in-service provided specifically for paraprofessionals in a given school year. A 5-point Likert scale was used, "1" meaning 0-1 clock hours, "2" meaning 2-5 clock hours, "3" meaning 6-10 clock hours, "4" meaning 11-19 clock hours and "5" meaning 20 or more clock hours. Each of the three groups participating in the survey reported their perceptions on the amount of clock hours of training they believed paraprofessionals were provided in a year.

The building administrators perceived more clock hours of training were taking place than did the special education teachers or the paraprofessionals. The disparity between the groups is obvious when comparing specific survey responses (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Perceived Clock Hours of Training Provided to Paraprofessionals in a Year**

Group	Hours of Training					Total
	0-1	2-5	6-10	11-19	20 or More	
Principals and Asst.	13	55	36	14	5	123
<b>Principals</b>						
Special Education Teachers	106	144	84	27	20	381
Paraprofessionals	165	157	103	42	21	992
<b>Actual number of responses</b>						

**Percentages of Clock Hours of Training Provided to Paraprofessionals in a Year**

Group	Hours of Training				
	0-1	2-5	6-10	11-19	20 or More
Principals and Asst.	10.6	44.7	29.3	11.4	4.1
<b>Principals</b>					
Special Education Teachers	27.8	37.8	22.0	7.1	5.2
Paraprofessionals	32.0	34.4	20.0	8.1	4.1
<b>Percentages of responses</b>					

When responding to survey question number six, "Is initial training currently provided for paraprofessionals by your educational agency/school district?" a 5-point Likert scale was used: "1" meaning never, "2" meaning seldom, "3" meaning sometimes, "4" meaning often and "5" meaning always. The building principals and assistant principals felt the initial training was taking place with a 3.80 mean score and a standard deviation of 1.09, followed by the special education teachers at 3.04 mean score and a 1.31 standard deviation, and paraprofessionals at 2.68 mean score and a 1.37 standard deviation.

When analyzing specific survey responses, it is interesting to note that 81.1% of the building principals and assistant principals answered "always," "often" and "sometimes" to initial training being provided compared to 58.8% of the special education teachers and 52.3% of the paraprofessionals. It is also worth noting that 26% of the paraprofessionals stated they did not believe any initial training was provided to paraprofessionals by their educational agency or school district, compared to 11.1% of the special education teachers and none of the building principals.

### Research Question Two

What are the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building principals and assistant principals, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

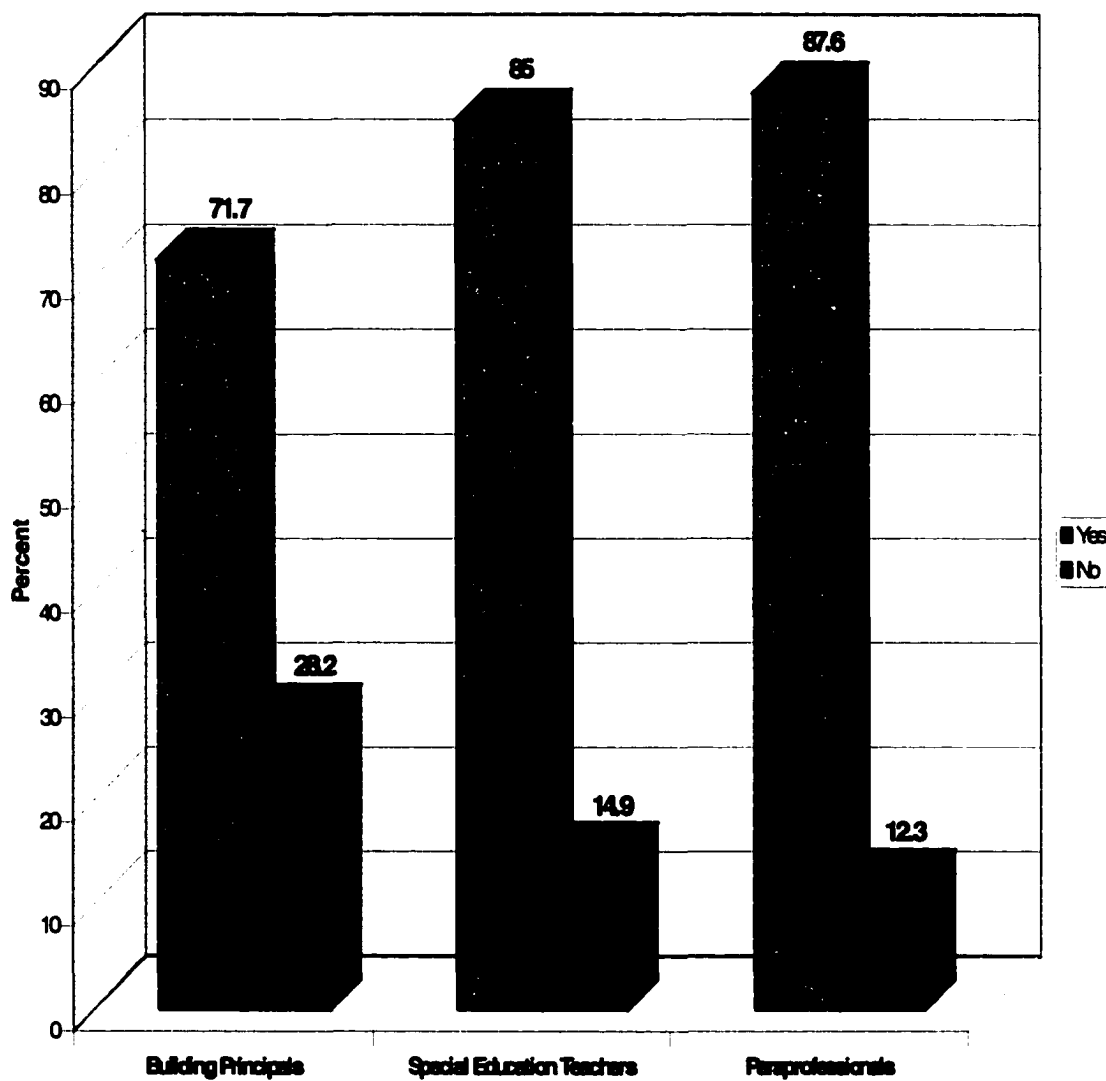
The majority of the respondents in the three groups felt that paraprofessionals should be required to undergo some type of training program as a prerequisite to employment in the area of special education with 71.7% of the building principals and

assistant principals, 85% of the special education teachers and 87.6% of the paraprofessionals responding “yes” when questioned if they believed training needed to be a prerequisite to employment. Only 28.2% of the building principals, 14.9% of the special education teachers and 12.3% of the paraprofessionals did not believe training should be a prerequisite (see Figure 1).

All three groups participating in the study scored higher than 3.95 on a “5”-point scale, indicating they felt training in each of the 11 specific areas presented was necessary. These 11 areas included: school policies, legal and ethical issues, job roles and responsibilities, knowledge of disabling conditions, behavior management, tutoring techniques, recording and reporting student behavior, instructional materials, equipment operations, first aid, and job specific skills (see Table 2).

When examining the topic mean scores for each group, it is worth noting that (a) job role expectations, (b) behavior management and (c) first aid/safety were in the top four highest scores for each group. This suggests a common belief among the three groups that the training area was needed (see Table 2).

Training in regard to job role expectations and responsibilities was the highest rated area of perceived training need by all three groups; the building principals and assistant principals had a mean score of 4.67 ( $SD = .55$ ), special education teachers had a mean score of 4.74 ( $SD = .55$ ) and paraprofessionals had a mean score of 4.59 ( $SD = .74$ ) (see Table 2). It is also interesting to note that paraprofessionals had “knowledge of disability conditions” as their third highest need with a mean score of 4.47 ( $SD = .84$ ) and the building principals had that topic as sixth with a mean score of 4.37 ( $SD = .72$ ), and



**Figure 1.** Percentage of building principals, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who feel that paraprofessionals should be required to undergo initial training prior to employment.



Table 2

**Training Topic Areas in Order of Perceived Need Based on Mean Score**

<b>Principals and Assistant Principals</b>			<b>Special Education Teachers</b>			<b>Paraprofessionals</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>1 Job Role Expectations</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>.55</b>	<b>1 Job Role Expectations</b>	<b>4.74</b>	<b>.55</b>	<b>1 Job Role Expectations</b>	<b>4.59</b>	<b>.74</b>
<b>2 Behavior Management</b>	<b>4.51</b>	<b>.57</b>	<b>2 Behavior Management</b>	<b>4.60</b>	<b>.68</b>	<b>2 Behavior Management</b>	<b>4.51</b>	<b>.81</b>
<b>3 First Aid/Safety</b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>.70</b>	<b>3 Legal, Ethical Issues</b>	<b>4.56</b>	<b>.70</b>	<b>3 Knowledge of Disability Cond.</b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>.84</b>
<b>4 Legal, Ethical Issues</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>.74</b>	<b>4 First Aid/Safety</b>	<b>4.54</b>	<b>.70</b>	<b>4 First Aid/Safety</b>	<b>4.45</b>	<b>.83</b>
<b>5 Job Specific Skills</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>.74</b>	<b>5 School Policies</b>	<b>4.53</b>	<b>.72</b>	<b>5 School Policies</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>.80</b>
<b>6 Knowledge of Disability Cond.</b>	<b>4.37</b>	<b>.72</b>	<b>6 Knowledge of Disability Cond.</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>.67</b>	<b>6 Legal, ethical Issues</b>	<b>4.37</b>	<b>.87</b>
<b>7 School Policies</b>	<b>4.32</b>	<b>.88</b>	<b>7 Job Specific Skills</b>	<b>4.45</b>	<b>.78</b>	<b>7 Job Specific Skills</b>	<b>4.35</b>	<b>.90</b>
<b>8 Tutoring Techniques</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>.82</b>	<b>8 Tutoring Techniques</b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>.81</b>	<b>8 Recording and Reporting</b>	<b>4.27</b>	<b>.93</b>
<b>9 Recording and Reporting</b>	<b>4.12</b>	<b>.85</b>	<b>9 Recording and Reporting</b>	<b>4.29</b>	<b>.83</b>	<b>9 Instructional Materials</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>.90</b>
<b>10 Equipment Operations</b>	<b>4.06</b>	<b>.90</b>	<b>10 Equipment Operations</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>.90</b>	<b>10 Tutoring Techniques</b>	<b>4.22</b>	<b>.91</b>
<b>11 Instructional Materials</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>.87</b>	<b>11 Instructional Materials</b>	<b>4.14</b>	<b>.84</b>	<b>11 Equipment Operations</b>	<b>4.14</b>	<b>.98</b>

the teachers as sixth with a mean score of 4.49 ( $SD = .67$ ). Paraprofessional training on specific school policies was the fifth highest need area according to the paraprofessionals and special education teachers at a mean score of 4.43 ( $SD = .80$ ) and 4.53 ( $SD = .72$ ), respectively, yet the building principals felt that it was seventh highest need with a mean score of 4.32 ( $SD = .88$ )(see Table 2).

Combining all three groups' responses, a collective perspective was gained in relation to the perceived need of each of the eleven topic areas (see Table 3). It became apparent that the majority of participants in all three groups participating in the study felt that all of the 11 training topic areas were necessary with the mean scores ranging from 4.66 to 4.14 on a "5"-point scale with "1" representing the lowest need for training and "5" representing the highest need for training. The training topic of "training on equipment operation" was the lowest scoring topic, with a mean score of 4.16 ( $SD = .88$ ) and the training topic of "job role expectations" was the highest scoring with a mean score of 4.66 ( $SD = .65$ )(see Table 3).

### Research Question Three

What are the differences in perceptions about current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building principals and assistant principals, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

When examining the difference between the current training and the perceived training needs across the three groups, two-way ANOVAs were used to examine the 11

Table 3

**Training Topic Areas in Order of Perceived Need: Average of All Three Groups****Combined**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>SD</u></b>
1	Job Role Expectations	4.66	.65
2	Behavior Management	4.55	.74
3	First Aid/Safety	4.49	.77
4	Knowledge of Disability Conditions	4.46	.76
5	School Policies	4.45	.78
6	Legal, Ethical Issues	4.45	.79
7	Job Specific Skills	4.40	.83
8	Tutoring Techniques	4.30	.87
9	Recording and Reporting	4.26	.88
10	Instructional Materials	4.16	.88
11	Equipment Operations	4.14	.94

topic areas analyzed in this study. Researchers still differ in opinions on whether a Likert scale instrument can be used adequately for parametric analysis. For this study, it was assumed that individual Likert scale responses represented internal level data.

**Initial Training.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1039)=27.621, p<.0005$  (see Table 4). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. The simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 5). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 6). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were both significant (see Table 7). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p<.0005$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p<.0005$ ) (see Table 6). The teachers rated current practice significantly higher than paraprofessionals ( $p<.0005$ )(see Table 6). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that teachers rated perceived need significantly higher than paraprofessionals ( $p = .001$ ) (see Table 6).

**On Going Training.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1044)=16.449, p<.0005$  (see Table 8). To follow-up the significant interaction simple main effects tests were conducted for need at each level of group. The simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 9). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 10). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were both significant (see Table 11). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p<.0005$ )

Table 4

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding Initial Paraprofessional Training Provided by District**

<b>Source</b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
Group	82.565	2	41.283	35.161	<.0005
Error	1219.890	1039	1.174		<.0005
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
Need	807.635	1	807.635	824.479	<.0005
Need/Group	54.113	2	27.056	27.621	<.0005
Error	1017.774	1039	0.980		

Table 5

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for each Group Regarding Initial Paraprofessional Training Provided by District**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	48.515	1	1039	<.0005
Teachers	596.825	1	1039	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	951.509	1	1039	<.0005

Table 6

Initial Paraprofessional Training Provided by District

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.8000	1.09	3.0443	1.31	2.6791	1.37
Perceived	4.6720	0.59	4.7414	0.57	4.5890	0.72

Table 7

Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each level of Need Regarding Initial  
Paraprofessional Training Provided by District

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Current Practice</u>					
Contrast	131.401	2	65.701	37.912	<.0005
Error	1800.568	1039	1.733		
<u>Perceived Need</u>					
Contrast	5.277	2	2.638	6.272	<.0005
Error	437.095	1039	0.421		



Table 8

Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding On-going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Between Subjects</u>					
Group	45.119	2	22.560	20.072	<.0005
Error	1173.371	1044	1.124		<.0005
<u>Within Subjects</u>					
Need	645.031	1	645.031	832.523	<.0005
Need/Group	25.490	2	12.745	16.449	<.0005
Error	808.881	1044	0.775		

Table 9

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding On-going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District**

<b>Group</b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
Principals	63.105	1	1044	<.0005
Teachers	673.638	1	1044	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	754.137	1	1044	<.0005

Table 10

**Means and Standard Deviations for On-going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
<b>Current</b>	3.6032	1.04	2.9173	1.130	2.8196	1.22
<b>Perceived</b>	4.4841	0.70	4.5109	0.66	4.3333	0.80

Table 11

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at each Level of Need Regarding On-going Paraprofessional Training Provided by District**

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<b><u>Current Practice</u></b>					
Contrast	62.862	2	31.431	23.227	<.0005
Error	1412.750	1044	1.353		
<b><u>Perceived Need</u></b>					
Contrast	7.747	2	3.873	7.101	<.0005
Error	569.502	1044	0.546		

and paraprofessionals ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 10). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that teachers rated perceived need significantly higher than paraprofessionals ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 10).

Training Outside the District. The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1041) = 20.449, p < .0005$  (see Table 12). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All of the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 13). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 14). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were both significant (see Table 15). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p < .0005$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 14). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that none of the groups perceived the need significantly higher than the other (see Table 14).

School Policies. The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1031) = 5.469, p = .004$  (see Table 16). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All of the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 17). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 18). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were non-significant (see Table 19)

Legal Issues. The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1034) = 9.651, p < .0005$  (see Table 20). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. The simple main effects

Table 12

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding Outside of District Paraprofessional Training**

<b>Source</b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
Group	24.889	2	12.445	11.121	<.0005
Error	1164.886	1041	1.119		<.0005
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
Need	548.719	1	548.719	735.894	<.0005
Need/Group	30.496	2	15.248	20.449	<.0005
Error	776.222	1041	0.746		

Table 13

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Outside of District Paraprofessional Training**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	46.029	1	1041	<.0005
Teachers	568.237	1	1041	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	771.476	1	1041	<.0005

Table 14

Means and Standard Deviations for Outside of District Paraprofessional Training

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	2.7222	0.93	2.1299	0.93	1.9941	0.99
Perceived	3.4603	0.97	3.5711	0.97	3.4961	0.98



Table 15

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding Outside of District****Paraprofessional Training**

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<b><u>Current Practice</u></b>					
Contrast	53.582	2	26.791	29.284	<.0005
Error	952.375	1041	0.915		
<b><u>Perceived Need</u></b>					
Contrast	1.804	2	0.902	0.950	<0.387
Error	988.732	1041	0.950		

Table 16

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding School Policies on Paraprofessional Training**

<b>Source</b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
Group	1.802	2	0.901	0.662	<.0005
Error	1403.424	1031	1.361		.516
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
Need	274.354	1	274.354	347.771	<.0005
Need/Group	8.628	2	4.314	5.469	.004
Error	813.349	1031	0.789		

Table 17

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding School Policies on Paraprofessional Training**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	30.007	1	1031	<.0005
Teachers	283.999	1	1031	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	295.268	1	1031	<.0005

Table 18

**Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the Area of School Policies**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.7049	1.12	3.4815	1.17	3.4714	1.33
Perceived	4.3279	0.88	4.5333	0.72	4.4300	0.80

Table 19

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding School Policies on Paraprofessional Training**

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Current Practice</u>					
Contrast	5.668	2	2.834	1.834	.016
Error	1592.823	1031	1.545		
<u>Perceived Need</u>					
Contrast	4.762	2	2.381	3.935	.020
Error	623.950	1031	0.605		

Table 20

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding Legal Issues on Paraprofessional Training**

<b>Source</b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
Group	15.816	2	7.908	5.636	<.0005
Error	1450.750	1034	1.403		.004
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
Need	459.793	1	459.793	527.852	<.0005
Need/Group	16.814	2	8.407	9.651	<.0005
Error	900.682	1034	0.871		

tests were all significant (see Table 21). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 22). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were both significant (see Table 23). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p=.001$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p=.001$ ) (see Table 22). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that teachers rated perceived need significantly higher than paraprofessionals ( $p=.001$ ) (see Table 22).

**Job Role Expectations.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1035)=12.851, p<.0005$  (see Table 24). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 25). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 26). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were both significant (see Table 27). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p<.0005$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p<.0005$ ) (see Table 26). Pairwise comparison tests also revealed that teachers rated perceived need significantly higher than paraprofessionals ( $p=.001$ ) (see Table 26).

**Knowledge of Disability.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1034)=23.641, p<.0005$  (see Table 28). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All of the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 29). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 30). The simple main effects tests

Table 21

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Legal Issues on Paraprofessional Training**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	44.819	1	1034	<.0005
Teachers	449.243	1	1034	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	429.311	1	1034	<.0005



Table 22

Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the Area of Legal Issues

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.6423	1.08	3.1704	1.23	3.1611	1.37
Perceived	4.4390	0.74	4.5605	0.70	4.3733	0.87

Table 23

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding Legal Issues on Paraprofessional Training**

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<b><u>Current Practice</u></b>					
Contrast	24.693	2	12.34	7.473	.001
Error	1708.294	1034	1.652		
<b><u>Perceived Need</u></b>					
Contrast	7.937	2	3.969	6.380	.002
Error	643.137	1034	0.622		

Table 24

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding Job Role Expectations**

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Between Subjects</u>					
Group	32.196	2	16.098	17.036	<.0005
Error	978.003	1035	0.945		<.0005
<u>Within Subjects</u>					
Need	255.307	1	255.307	348.986	<.0005
Need/Group	18.803	2	9.402	12.851	<.0005
Error	757.172	1035	0.732		

Table 25

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Job Role Expectations**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	17.285	1	1035	<.0005
Teachers	292.810	1	1035	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	380.652	1	1035	<.0005

Table 26

Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the area of Job RoleExpectations

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	4.2258	0.87	3.7139	1.06	3.5508	1.21
Perceived	4.6774	0.55	4.7463	0.55	4.5938	0.74

Table 27

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding Job Role****Expectations**

<b><u>Need</u></b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Current Practice</u></b>					
Contrast	45.731	2	22.865	18.254	<.0005
Error	1296.459	1035	1.253		
<b><u>Perceived Need</u></b>					
Contrast	5.268	2	2.634	6.214	.002
Error	438.716	1035	0.424		

Table 28

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding Knowledge of Disabilities**

<b>Source</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
Group	22.373	2	11.186	10.497	<.0005
Error	1101.939	1034	1.066		<.0005
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
Need	551.154	1	551.154	700.564	<.0005
Need/Group	37.198	2	18.599	23.641	<.0005
Error	813.478	1034	0.787		

Table 29

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Knowledge of Disabilities**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	40.598	1	1034	<.0005
Teachers	512.904	1	1034	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	809.131	1	1034	<.0005



Table 30

Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the area of Knowledge of Disabilities

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.6532	0.91	3.0792	1.08	2.8919	1.21
Perceived	4.3710	0.72	4.4926	0.67	4.4735	0.84

for group at each level of need were conducted and the current practice was significant ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 31). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p < .0005$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 30).

**Behavior Management.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1029) = 17.035, p < .0005$  (see Table 32). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. The simple main effects tests were all significant (see Table 33). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 34). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were conducted and the current practice was significant ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 35). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p < .0005$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 34).

**Tutoring.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1026) = 11.093, p < .0005$  (see Table 36). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. The simple main effects tests were all significant (see Table 37). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 38). The simple main effects tests for each group at each level of need were both significant (see Table 39). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p = .001$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p < .0005$ ) (see Table 38).

Table 31

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding Knowledge of Disabilities**

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<b><u>Current Practice</u></b>					
Contrast	58.145	2	29.072	22.797	<.0005
Error	1318.611	1034	1.275		
<b><u>Perceived Need</u></b>					
Contrast	1.426	2	0.713	1.236	.291
Error	596.805	1034	0.577		

Table 32

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group****Regarding Behavior Management**

<b>Source</b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
Group	32.398	2	16.199	16.569	<.0005
Error	1005.998	1029	0.978		<.0005
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
Need	566.108	1	566.108	705.238	<.0005
Need/Group	27.348	2	13.674	17.035	<.0005
Error	825.999	1029	0.803		

Table 33

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Behavior Management**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	47.648	1	1029	<.0005
Teachers	592.219	1	1029	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	663.205	1	1029	<.0005

Table 34

**Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the area of Behavior Management**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.7967	0.87	3.0645	1.10	3.0652	1.18
Perceived	4.5854	0.57	4.6005	0.68	4.5158	0.81

Table 35

Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding BehaviorManagement

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Current Practice</u>					
Contrast	58.026	2	29.013	23.414	<.0005
Error	1275.089	1029	1.239		
<u>Perceived Need</u>					
Contrast	1.720	2	0.860	1.589	.205
Error	556.907	1029	0.541		

Table 36

Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across GroupRegarding Tutoring

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Between Subjects</u>					
Group	27.135	2	13.568	12.007	<.0005
Error	1159.393	1026	1.130		<.0005
<u>Within Subjects</u>					
Need	650.746	1	650.746	757.452	<.0005
Need/Group	19.061	2	9.530	11.093	<.0005
Error	881.462	1026	0.859		



Table 37

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Tutoring**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	64.721	1	1026	<.0005
Teachers	563.307	1	1026	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	716.407	1	1026	<.0005

Table 38

Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the area of Tutoring

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.2810	1.01	2.8628	1.02	2.6706	1.21
Perceived	4.2397	0.82	4.4165	0.81	4.2288	0.91

Table 39

Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding Tutoring

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Current Practice</u>					
Contrast	37.757	2	18.879	15.157	<.0005
Error	1277.895	1026	1.246		
<u>Perceived Need</u>					
Contrast	8.439	2	4.219	5.674	.004
Error	762.961	1026	0.744		

Pairwise comparison tests revealed that teachers rated perceived need significantly higher than paraprofessionals ( $p = .003$ ) (see Table 38).

Observing and Recording Student Behavior. The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1026)=9.628, p<.0005$  (see Table 40). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. The simple main effects tests were all significant (see Table 41). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 42). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were conducted and the current practice was significant (see Table 43). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p=.008$ ) and paraprofessionals rated current practices significantly higher than teachers ( $p=.002$ ) (see Table 42).

Instructional Materials. The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1024)=10.898, p<.0005$  (see Table 44). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All of the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 45). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 46). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were both significant (see Table 47). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p=.002$ ) (see Table 46). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated perceived need significantly lower than paraprofessionals ( $p = .006$ ) (see Table 46).

Table 40

Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs for NeedsAcross Group Regarding Observing, Recording Student Behavior

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Between Subjects</u>					
Group	7.143	2	3.571	2.752	<.0005
Error	1331.441	1026	1.298		.064
<u>Within Subjects</u>					
Need	497.240	1	497.240	574.044	<.0005
Need/Group	16.679	2	8.340	9.628	<.0005
Error	888.727	1026	0.866		

Table 41

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Observing, Recording Student Behavior**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	59.924	1	1026	<.0005
Teachers	489.721	1	1026	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	397.328	1	1026	<.0005

Table 42

**Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the Area of Observing,  
Recording Student Behavior**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.2033	1.11	2.8383	1.12	3.1052	1.24
Perceived	4.1220	0.85	4.2910	0.83	4.2738	0.93

Table 43

Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at each Level of Need Regarding Observing,Recording Student Behavior

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Current Practice</u>					
Contrast	21.000	2	10.5	7.577	.001
Error	1421.835	1026	1.386		
<u>Perceived Need</u>					
Contrast	2.822	2	1.411	1.813	.164
Error	798.333	1026	0.778		



Table 44

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group**  
**Regarding Instructional Materials**

<b>Source</b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
<b>Group</b>	4.578	2	2.289	1.943	<.0005
<b>Error</b>	1206.516	1024	1.178		.144
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
<b>Need</b>	408.845	1	408.485	488.096	<.0005
<b>Need/Group</b>	18.241	2	9.121	10.898	<.0005
<b>Error</b>	856.979	1024	0.837		

Table 45

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Instructional Materials**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	34.273	1	1024	<.0005
Teachers	383.379	1	1024	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	478.545	1	1024	<.0005

Table 46

**Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the Area of Instructional Materials**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.2764	0.91	2.8747	1.08	2.9723	1.20
Perceived	3.9593	0.87	4.1429	0.84	4.2317	0.90

Table 47

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding Instructional Materials**

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<b><u>Current Practice</u></b>					
Contrast	15.176	2	7.588	6.052	.002
Error	1283.9	1024	1.254		
<b><u>Perceived Need</u></b>					
Contrast	7.643	2	3.821	5.020	.007
Error	779.547	1024	0.761		

**Equipment Operation.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1029)=15.647, p<.0005$  (see Table 48). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 49). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 50). The simple main effects tests for group were conducted at each level of need and current practice was significant ( $p<.0005$ ) (see Table 51). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p<.0005$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p<.0005$ ) (see Table 50).

**First Aid and Safety.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1030)=5.679, p=.004$  (see Table 52). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 53). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 54). The simple effects tests for group at each level of need were both non-significant (see Table 55).

**Job Specific Skills.** The interaction between need and group was significant  $F(2, 1025)=10.348, p<.0005$  (see Table 56). The significant interaction was followed up with simple main effects tests for need at each level of group. All the simple main effects tests were significant (see Table 57). For each group the perceived need was significantly greater than the current practice (see Table 58). The simple main effects tests for group at each level of need were conducted and current practice was significant ( $p<.0005$ ) (see Table 59). Pairwise comparison tests revealed that principals rated current

Table 48

Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across GroupRegarding Equipment Operation

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Between Subjects</u>					
Group	15.217	2	7.608	5.291	<.0005
Error	1479.775	1029	1.438		.005
<u>Within Subjects</u>					
Need	346.262	1	346.262	434.068	<.0005
Need/Group	24.964	2	12.482	15.647	<.0005
Error	820.848	1029	0.798		

Table 49

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Equipment Operation**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	23.373	1	1029	<.0005
Teachers	329.104	1	1029	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	498.896	1	1029	<.0005

Table 50

**Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the Area of Equipment Operation**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.5161	1.00	3.0347	1.08	2.8911	1.26
Perceived	4.0645	0.90	4.1762	0.90	4.1465	0.98



Table 51

Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding EquipmentOperation

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Current Practice</u>					
Contrast	38.996	2	19.498	14.460	<.0005
Error	1387.491	1029	1.348		
<u>Perceived Nee</u>					
Contrast	1.185	2	0.593	0.668	.513
Error	913.132	1029	0.887		

Table 52

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding First-Aid and Safety**

<b>Source</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
<b><u>Between Subjects</u></b>					
Group	4.735	2	2.367	1.956	<.0005
Error	1246.422	1030	1.210		<.0005
<b><u>Within Subjects</u></b>					
Need	439.466	1	439.466	554.761	<.0005
Need/Group	8.998	2	4.499	5.679	.004
Error	815.937	1030	0.792		

Table 53

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding First-Aid and Safety**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	59.232	1	1030	<.0005
Teachers	432.756	1	1030	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	425.822	1	1030	<.0005

Table 54

**Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the Area of First-Aid and Safety**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.5984	0.91	3.2438	1.15	3.3084	1.27
Perceived	4.4754	0.69	4.5498	0.70	4.4597	0.83

Table 55

**Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding First-Aid and Safety**

<b>Need</b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b><u>Current Practice</u></b>					
Contrast	11.850	2	5.925	4.186	.015
Error	1458.003	1030	1.416		
<b><u>Perceived Need</u></b>					
Contrast	1.883	2	0.941	1.604	.202
Error	604.356	1030	0.587		

Table 56

**Analysis of Variance for Current Needs Compared to Perceived Needs Across Group  
Regarding Job-Specific Skills**

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
<u>Between Subjects</u>					
Group	30.421	2	15.211	12.091	<.0005
Error	1289.498	1025	1.258		<.0005
<u>Within Subjects</u>					
Need	458.663	1	458.663	564.347	<.0005
Need/Group	16.821	2	8.411	10.348	<.0005
Error	833.052	1025	0.813		

Table 57

**Simple Main Effects Test for ANOVA Comparing Current Needs to Perceived Needs  
for Each Group Regarding Job-Specific Skills**

<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>p</b>
Principals	46.096	1	1025	<.0005
Teachers	390.282	1	1025	<.0005
Paraprofessionals	575.575	1	1025	<.0005

Table 58

**Means and Standard Deviations for Paraprofessional Training in the Area of Job-Specific Skills**

	Principals		Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Current	3.6504	1.03	3.2015	1.12	2.9901	1.25
Perceived	4.4309	0.74	4.4577	0.78	4.3539	0.89



Table 59

Simple Main Effects Tests for Group at Each Level of Need Regarding Job-Specific Skills

<u>Need</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
<u>Current Practice</u>					
Contrast	44.730	2	22.365	16.171	<.0005
Error	1417.597	1025	1.383		
<u>Perceived Need</u>					
Contrast	2.512	2	1.256	1.826	.162
Error	704.954	1025	0.688		

practice significantly higher than teachers ( $p=.001$ ) and paraprofessionals ( $p<.0005$ ) (see Table 58).

#### Research Question Four

What changes have occurred in current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska since 1982? In the past 18 years, there have been many changes in special education programs and in the role of the paraprofessionals who work with special education students. In 1982, the Nebraska Department of Education reported 30,695 students in special education programs and in the 1999/2000 academic year, nearly 43,531 students were receiving services (Bird, 2000). This is a 29.5% increase of special education students in Nebraska. In 1982, the number of paraprofessionals working in special education programs was not recorded, but in the 1999/2000 academic year, the Nebraska Department of Education reported 2,104 paraprofessionals working in such programs.

The role of the paraprofessional has also changed. Vasa et al. (1982) reported 84% of the paraprofessionals participating in his study had been employed less than 5 years in their position. Sixty-two percent of the paraprofessionals in this study had been employed less than 5 years. Vasa et al. (1982) reported only 14% of the participating paraprofessionals working in Nebraska at that time had been in their positions 5 or more years, while this study reports 30% of the paraprofessionals being employed 5 or more years. This suggests that paraprofessionals are staying in their positions longer in 1999/2000 than they did in 1982. There was also a disparity in the amount of clock hours

of training provided in 1982 compared to the findings of this study (see Table 60). In 1982, Vasa et al. reported that 80.1% of the paraprofessionals in Nebraska received 1 hour or less of training a year. In the 1999/2000 academic year, only 31.9% received such a limited amount of training. In 1982, 5.1% of paraprofessionals received 2 to 5 hours of training and 9% received 6 to 10 hours of training, compared to 1999/2000 where 30.4% received 2 to 5 hours of training and 19.9% received 6 to 10 hours of training, respectively. Understanding that virtually no training takes place between 0 and 1 hours, for the purposes of this study 2 to 5 hours and 6 to 10 hours were combined to analyze the prospect of substantive training. In 1982, 14.1% of the participants polled felt that paraprofessionals received between 2 to 10 hours of training as compared to 50.3% in 1999/2000. This was a 36.2% increase in the perceived amount of paraprofessional training from 1982 to 1999/2000.

In Nebraska in the 1999/2000 school year there were 2104 paraprofessionals employed by schools. Thirty-six percent of that 2,104 is 758. The increase in training could have potentially affected these paraprofessionals. This articulates to 758 paraprofessionals potentially being affected with increases of professional training during the 1999/2000 school year.

Vasa et al. (1982), reported a difference between administrators as compared to special education teachers and paraprofessionals in their perception of “no initial training” being offered to newly employed paraprofessionals. Vasa et al. (1982) reported that 60% of the building administrators, 82% of the special education teachers and 81% of the

Table 60

**Hours of Training Paraprofessionals Perceive They Receive in One Year**

Number of training hours	Year	
	1982	1999/2000
0-1	80.1	33.8
2-5	5.1	32.1
6-10	9.0	21.1
11-19	1.8	8.7
20 or more	4.0	4.3

**Note.** Values represent the percentages as viewed by paraprofessionals.

paraprofessionals said “no initial training” was provided for newly employed paraprofessionals (see Table 61). In the 1999/2000 academic year, there were no building administrators who reported “no initial training” was provided while 11% of the special education teachers and 56% of the paraprofessionals reported the “no initial training” was provided to newly appointed paraprofessionals working in special education programs. The amount of responses of “no initial training” decreased in all three groups between 1982 and 1999/2000. The paraprofessionals perceived the smallest amount of change with 81% of the paraprofessionals in 1982 and 56% of the paraprofessionals in 1999/2000 believing that “no initial training” was offered to newly employed paraprofessionals. This was a 25% decrease in those paraprofessionals who believed “no initial training” was being offered. There was a 71% decrease among the special education teachers and a 60% decrease among the building administrators. It is interesting to note the discrepancies between the groups in the perception of “no initial training” offered to newly employed paraprofessionals over the past 18 years.

### Summary

This chapter presented the results from the surveys and a brief summary analysis of the data collected. Chapter 5 will interpret these findings, draw and discuss conclusions, make recommendations for future paraprofessional training programs, and offer suggestions for further research.

Table 61

Perceptions of No Training Offered to Newly Employed Paraprofessionals

Study	Group		
	Administrators	Teachers	Paraprofessionals
1982	60%	82%	81%
1999/2000	0%	11%	56%

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary

There has been little investigation of the current and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education departments in the state of Nebraska. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was revised in 1997, mandated the training of paraprofessionals to ensure a level of competency. Due to the concern that paraprofessionals were not being adequately trained for the type of tasks they were being asked to perform, the IDEA included a statement mandating that all paraprofessionals be trained and supervised (Individual with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).

One could assume that if the IDEA had mandated training for paraprofessionals that all schools and school districts would attempt to be in compliance. However, there has been little research done in Nebraska since the Vasa et al. (1982) study to confirm this notion. The 1982 study showed that there was a considerable difference between the reports of building administrators, and reports of special education teachers and paraprofessionals in their perceptions of the current training practices for paraprofessionals in their districts. Sixty percent of the building administrators and 81% of paraprofessionals stated no formal training was provided to paraprofessionals. This is a 21% difference between the two groups. Given that the Vasa et al. (1982) study was completed prior to the IDEA's requirement, it was uncertain if the amount of training for paraprofessionals had increased and if the mandate was being met.

This study examined the current training practices and the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska as assessed by building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals. It is important that the school districts and their patrons know if they are abiding by the Nebraska statutes and the IDEA's requirements in regards to paraprofessional training.

### Purpose

The purposes of this study were to determine (a) the current training practices for paraprofessionals as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in special education programs in the state of Nebraska, (b) the perceived training needs of paraprofessional, as viewed by building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, (c) the differences that exist between current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals and the differences that exist in perceptions of building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals, and (d) the changes that have occurred in training practices since 1982.

This chapter interprets the findings from the data collection, which was presented in Chapter Four. The results from that chapter will be used as a basis for discussion.

Conclusions drawn from this study will also be used to make recommendations for actions and for further research.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study. Conclusions are presented for each research question, with attention to the relevance and importance of



findings and implications for practice. Discussion and recommendations follow this section.

### Research Question One

What are the current training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

Based on the data from the survey participants' responses in regard to the amount of current clock hours of training being provided and initial training being offered, this study found that the majority of Nebraska school districts are adhering in some form to the IDEA's and the state's legal requirements regarding the training of paraprofessionals who work with special education students. This is evidenced by 66% of the paraprofessionals themselves indicating that they received two or more hours of training in the 1999-2000 school year. Further, all participant groups agreed that some form of training is occurring, but the three groups surveyed in this study had different perceptions on the amount of training that is currently taking place. For example, the administrators reported more training occurring than both the special education teachers and paraprofessionals reported.

This difference in perception is important because it creates the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. When building administrators perceive more training is taking place than do paraprofessionals, there may be misunderstandings on the qualifications of paraprofessionals to perform certain tasks or on the need for additional training. If districts are aware of and understand the differences in perceptions that exist

regarding paraprofessional training, school leaders could work to bridge the gap. The district could then identify possible reasons for these discrepancies and design ways to address them. Otherwise, paraprofessionals could be placed in positions in which they are under-qualified, which could provide inadequate services to students of greatest need, those in special education.

A possible reason for the differences between the three groups of respondents on the amount of training occurring in their districts could be due to a misunderstanding of the definition of what “training” actually entails. Building administrators might consider “on the job training” as training when responding to the survey, whereas paraprofessional and special education teachers might only be viewing “formal training” as training. These examples could account for differences and could be valuable information for all three groups. This data could stimulate discussions on the different perceptions that the three groups have and provide an awareness of the paraprofessionals’ roles and the need for training. Through their discussions and the process of sharing information, these potential miscommunications could be limited and a common understanding created. Appropriate decisions about additional training could thus be better assured

The importance of school districts attending to paraprofessional training practices should not be underestimated. Research indicates that paraprofessionals in general have little or no training prior to school district employment (Vasa et al., 1982; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; French & Cabell, 1993; Hofmeister, 1993; Haselkorn & Fielder, 1996). Yet, in 1986 Steckelberg & Vasa found that paraprofessionals can spend much of their day providing direct instruction, and recent trends in inclusionary practices are only likely

to increase this critical instructional role (Goessling, 1998). This study found that school districts statewide in Nebraska are meeting IDEA's paraprofessional training requirement in some fashion. It is critical to identify the current paraprofessional training that is effective and useful as well as content and modes of training that are still needed.

The training that occurs after employment is essential in equipping paraprofessionals with the skills needed to meet students' special needs.

### Research Question Two

What are the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

This study showed that Nebraska school districts are not meeting the building administrators', special education teachers' and paraprofessionals' desired expectations in regard to paraprofessional training. The data indicate that more paraprofessional training is desired in all of the eleven training areas covered in this study's survey. All three groups participating in the study scored higher than 3.95 on a "5"-point scale, indicating they felt more training was needed. These 11 areas included: school policies, legal and ethical issues, job roles and responsibilities, knowledge of disabling conditions, behavior management, tutoring techniques, recording and reporting student behavior, instructional materials, equipment operations, first aid, and job specific skills (see Table 2, pg77). All three respondent groups reported behavior management, legal issues, first-aid and safety, role expectations and understanding disabilities as topics of priority. The sentiment of the

need for more paraprofessional training was unanimous in this study and is consistent in other research studies (Goessling, 1998; French & Cabell, 1993; Passaro et al 1994). This may imply that more attention needs to be paid not only to the amount of training but also to the quality and type of paraprofessional training occurring in Nebraska school districts.

This study indicates that all three groups believe that more training is needed than is currently being offered. There appears to be a common understanding of the need for and potential benefit of training. The potential of conflict occurs when one group feels strongly about the need for additional training and another does not. For example, if the paraprofessionals perceived a need for additional training and the principals did not, a conflict could occur determining the need for paraprofessional training. That is not the case based on results from this study. All three groups questioned in this study felt that more training is needed. Such consensus would seem to establish an optimal environment for training, and perhaps increase the effectiveness of such training.

The perceived need for additional paraprofessional training may be due to the large quantity of information involved in administering special education programs. Special education by nature involves a wide range of information in relation to various disabilities identified and served through special education programs. It would be difficult to cover all the requested training topics within the IDEA (1997) requirements, particularly when paraprofessionals come to special education positions with little or no prior training. Research indicates a need for school districts to provide a wide variety of opportunities through which training can be accessed by paraprofessionals, so that training is increased. In order to identify appropriate topics, research also suggests using needs surveys as a first

step in planning, training and utilizing a collaborative approach that involves the participation of administrators, special education teachers and the paraprofessionals (French & Cabel, 1993; Pickett et al., 1993; Morgan & Ashbaker, 1994; Passaro et al., 1994).

Understanding the perceived need for training and appropriate topic selection is essential when planning future training programs. This study identified the need for training and eleven specific training topics. The topics included: school policies, legal and ethical issues, job roles and responsibilities, knowledge of disabling conditions, behavior management, tutoring techniques, recording and reporting student behavior, instructional materials, equipment operations, first aid, and job specific skills (see Table 2, pg77). This information will assist school districts and individual schools in narrowing the scope of their training to meet their greatest needs and maximizing the effectiveness of the training provided.

### Research Question Three

What are the differences in perceptions about current training practices and perceived training needs of paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in the state of Nebraska as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska?

This study found vast differences between the perceptions of current training practices and perceived training needs for paraprofessionals within and across the three groups. The findings of this study indicate statistically significant differences between the perception of the

amount of current training taking place and the amount of need perceived for each of the eleven training topics surveyed for all groups.

Perception of current training practices.

The data show that building administrators believe more training is currently taking place in schools than do special education teachers and paraprofessionals. This could be due to the separation between the building administrators and the classroom. Building administrators are often kept out of classrooms due to their administrative tasks and, therefore, may not be as aware of day to day classroom activities. It may also be a result of the building administrator's position of leadership and having ownership over building programs. He or she may idealistically believe that more training is taking place than is actually occurring. The building administrators may have also used a different personal definition of "training" than the special education teachers and the paraprofessionals did. For example, building administrators may view the teachers' on the job instruction to the paraprofessionals as training, while the paraprofessionals may not. The difference in the perceptions of the building administrators as compared to the special education teachers and paraprofessionals is an important concept to investigate and understand. School districts can use this information to become accurately informed and to learn why the differences in the perceptions of current practices exist. By doing so school districts can better address the needs of the staff and students and avoid wasting time, effort and resources.

It is also interesting to note that while the administrators differed from the teachers and paraprofessionals, the teachers and paraprofessionals had relatively similar opinions to

each other on the amount of current training being offered in 10 of the 11 specific topic areas presented. This difference may be due to special education teachers and paraprofessionals working closely together, and therefore, being directly affected when training does or does not occur. This may explain why they express similar opinions on the amount of training currently taking place.

The topic area where paraprofessionals and teachers did not agree was that of “reporting and recording student behavior.” The paraprofessionals’ mean score rating for current training practices on this topic was 3.10, while the special educators’ rating was 2.83 suggesting a higher rating ( $p < .002$ ) (see Table 2, pg77). School districts and special education teachers can use this information to better understand the different perceptions that may exist between special education teachers and the paraprofessionals, and to help explain the importance of various training topics provided. This understanding will also assist the paraprofessionals in better understanding the importance and relevance of the provided training.

#### Perceived training needs.

Although the building administrators believed that more training was currently taking place than did the special education teachers and paraprofessionals, the building administrators did agree with the two groups on the amount of training that needs to occur. All three groups believed more training is needed than is currently taking place. The special education teachers had a higher mean score than building administrators and paraprofessionals for training in 10 of the 11 topics (see Table 2, pg77). This could be due to the special education teachers’ direct supervision of paraprofessionals. The direct

supervision allows them the ability to be more fully aware of the paraprofessionals' competencies and deficiencies with regard to their specific job responsibilities and specific student needs. The reason teachers reported higher levels of importance to training areas could be based on the special education teachers' desires to have qualified and properly trained paraprofessionals working with them. It could be that the special education teachers inflated their ratings in an effort to suggest a need for increased overall training programs.

Special education teachers and paraprofessionals differed from each other significantly on the need for training in only three specific training topics areas. They were legal issues, job role expectations and tutoring. This information could be useful when designing paraprofessional training programs. For example, since the special education teachers identified the greatest need for paraprofessional training, they should be involved in the development and implementation of the training. Because the special education teachers work closely with paraprofessionals, they truly understand the need for training and would strive to make the training programs meaningful and successful. Special educators appear to be pivotal in creating effective paraprofessional training.

#### Research Question Four

What changes have occurred in training practices for paraprofessionals who work in special education programs in Nebraska since 1982?

The findings of this study suggest that there have been many changes in the training practices, as well as the role of the paraprofessional since 1982. This study indicates that more initial and ongoing paraprofessional training is taking place than did in



1982. The results of this study illustrate that Nebraska is better meeting the state and IDEA requirements in regard to paraprofessional training. It also shows that paraprofessionals are staying in their positions longer today than they did 18 years ago. The added initial and ongoing paraprofessional training that is currently occurring might be a factor as to why paraprofessionals are staying in their positions longer. If so, this signifies that Nebraska's state laws along with the IDEA's legislation regarding paraprofessional training have had a positive impact on the role of the paraprofessional.

The results of this study are important to share with those who have been working to improve the amount of paraprofessional training being offered in Nebraska. It is important for those individuals to realize the positive effects of their efforts. This information is also important for those individuals who are required to document such information for accountability and for those who write grants for special education programs.

#### Discussion

The three groups involved in this study believe more training is needed in all of the eleven specific training topic areas presented. These areas included: school policies, legal and ethical issues, job roles and responsibilities, knowledge of disabling conditions, behavior management, tutoring techniques, recording and reporting student behavior, instructional materials, equipment operations, first aid, and job specific skills (see Table 2, pg77). There are many factors that could contribute to this finding. For example, leaders of staff development programs in most public schools struggle to provide appropriate training to their certified teaching staff. School budgets are tight and priorities have to be made, so paraprofessionals who are classified staff, are often neglected. One reason for

the minimal training could be due, in part, to the fact that paraprofessionals are on the lower end of the pay scale and have a higher turnover rate than classified staff.

Time is another resource that contributes to priorities and choices. Finding the time to become informed or to train others on specific legislation and other relevant topics is difficult at all levels. There are limited substitutes for paraprofessionals, and paraprofessionals are often paid only for days worked when school is in session. To bring in paraprofessionals on in-service days would often require additional resources, which are often not available.

This study shows that Nebraska is not fully meeting the perceived needs of paraprofessionals in reference to training as perceived by building administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. It also suggests that just meeting the IDEA and Nebraska legal requirements is perhaps not enough. School districts and individual schools should use the results of this study, which clearly indicate that more paraprofessional training is desired, to help create ways to provide additional training. Additional training should better facilitate services to the students. The data from this study could also be used as a baseline, on which to set goals and monitor future growth and improvement.

While the need for additional training is obvious from this study, it must not be overlooked that progress has indeed been made. Paraprofessionals are remaining in their positions longer today than they did 18 years ago. Vasa et al. (1982) reported 84% of the paraprofessionals participating in his study had been employed less than 5 years in their position. Sixty-two percent of the paraprofessionals in this study had been employed less

than 5 years. Vasa et al. (1982) reported only 14% of the participating paraprofessionals working in Nebraska at that time had been in their positions 5 or more years, while this study reports 30% of the paraprofessionals being employed 5 or more years. This indicates that paraprofessionals are staying in their positions longer in 1999/2000 than they did in 1982. This could be attributed to the improved working conditions and the fact that IDEA has worked to improve special education programs across the country. The IDEA has focused on issues such as class size, professional training, and increased awareness and communication to improve the working conditions in public school special education programs. Paraprofessionals are also working more directly with students now as opposed to performing clerical and other tedious duties. This direct involvement with students can provide the paraprofessional with a feeling of ownership. Paraprofessionals working directly with students can see first hand the positive impact they have on the students, which can be extremely satisfying.

The literature suggests that educators believe that paraprofessionals have a positive effect on students and schools (Pickett 1990; Lacattiva 1985; Lenz 1985). School districts and educational agencies need to create methods and secure the resources necessary to maximize the paraprofessionals' production to obtain optimum results for students. Paraprofessionals are an essential element in most schools and need to be prioritized as such. The incorporation of properly trained paraprofessionals into schools has the potential for advantageous results (Blalock 1991).

## Recommendations

This study clearly indicates that more paraprofessional training is needed. The following are recommendations derived from this study in order to increase the amount of effective paraprofessional training.

### Recommendations for Schools and Districts

Every school and school district needs to develop a systematic method in which to provide training to paraprofessionals and determine whose responsibility it is to make sure that the training is taking place. This method should be continually reviewed to determine its effectiveness and to determine if all paraprofessionals, no matter when they join the staff, are receiving adequate and appropriate training. This systematic method should be documented and understood at all levels.

Initial training for newly hired paraprofessionals must be administered prior to paraprofessional placement in classrooms and schools. The curriculum for this training needs to have the capability of being implemented on an individual basis. In this way, paraprofessionals hired in the middle of a school year can be required to complete the training before placement. School districts have the option of designing their own curriculum to meet the specific needs of their school population or they can opt to use one of the many commercially packaged curriculums available. For example, training videos, training workbooks and web based curriculum programs are all available (Steckelberg & Vasa 1998). Despite the type of curriculum used, it is imperative that the paraprofessionals be compensated for their training time. By requiring the training prior

to specific placement in schools and by compensating paraprofessionals for the completion of the training, school districts are communicating the importance of the training.

Ongoing training is essential for further growth and to maximize productivity to better meet the needs of all students. A structured systematic process needs to be in place to assure that ongoing training is occurring and is effective. Formal classroom training on relevant topics with a practice component is one known effective method of offering training (Joyce and Showers 1980).

Study teams are another method of meeting paraprofessional training needs. Knowles (1978) discussed the importance of life situations and relevant learning. Study/learning teams are one method of doing both. Teams of teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators could be formed in areas of like-training topic interests. Using Stiggins' model and organizational framework, the study/learning teams could research the topics and share their learning by reports back to the team (Stiggins 2000). The team would then document learning and reports it to other interested parties. Study/learning team members should be compensated for their time and effort. This can be done by documentation of team progress and learning. Study/learning teams have the potential to be extremely effective for paraprofessionals due to the various functions and duties they are required to perform. Using the study/learning team method, teams of paraprofessionals, teachers and administrators can study and learn about specific topics that pertain to them, their student's IEP's and their positions. This is typically opposite of what often occurs in formal training sessions where paraprofessionals, teachers and

administrators are required to attend sessions about topics that may have no relevance to them and their position.

Ongoing paraprofessional training is an area that could to be addressed with additional planning and reflection time. Special education teachers and paraprofessionals are working continually on improving the services they provide to students. This is often done without much discussion or reflection. Additional compensated hours for paraprofessionals and special education teachers could improve and increase the on-the-job training that is currently taking place. Perhaps if paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers were given an additional 10 compensated hours of work time a semester to collaborate, the potential result could be substantial. The paraprofessionals and teachers could use this time to set goals, review and discuss student programs, daily schedules, IEP's and paraprofessionals' duties and roles. The process would open the lines of communication between the teacher and the paraprofessional to promote productivity and efficiency. The pairs should be allowed to choose when they want to use their additional collaborating time so that they can be most effective. The pairs should document the time progress and results of their collaborating sessions in order to receive compensation. This method of shared planning is designed specifically for special education teachers and the paraprofessionals they supervise and work directly with to address their life situation and concerns as well as their unique and individual needs.

#### Recommendations for the Nebraska Department of Education

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were derived specifically for the Nebraska Department of Education.

Define paraprofessional training so that a common language is created and include “on the job” opportunities. Communicate the definition and opportunities to paraprofessionals, teachers and building administrators (Mueller 2000).

Develop a paraprofessional training model within the state that includes who is responsible for assuring that training is taking place as well as other recommendations for the school districts, education service units, and state and community colleges (Bond 2000).

Create classroom and individual training materials and modules so that paraprofessionals in Nebraska have the resources needed to be successful in their positions. Disseminate this information and other information regarding resources, research, and training to all Nebraska educators, building administrators and paraprofessionals.

Educate state audiences in regard to the role of the paraprofessional, the legal implications of paraprofessional training and the paraprofessional’s impact on the learning process. Continue to advocate the need for increased training of paraprofessionals.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Survey research was used in the study to purposefully obtain a broad set of data from the three large groups being studied. By design, survey research does not reveal possible underlying explanations for the way subjects respond. For this reason, further research is needed to explain and clarify possible underlying explanations for data collected in this study. This study also stimulated additional questions and the need for

further research. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following are recommendations for further research.

Follow-up qualitative and quantitative studies would be of particular benefit to get an in-depth understanding of what building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals believe needs to be done to improve actual training procedures and how to improve the relevance of training topics. Further analysis could explain the differences that exist between building administrators, special education teachers and paraprofessionals and their perceptions of current training practices and perceived need.

Research should also be conducted to gain a better understanding of the benefits of paraprofessional training. A qualitative study, interviewing the special education teachers who supervise paraprofessionals could be extremely informative. Interviews prior to and after the paraprofessionals receive comprehensive training would provide specific data pertaining to the effects of the training and how those effects translate into the classroom. These studies could determine how additional hours of training affect paraprofessional performance, student success, as well as desire for additional training. Paraprofessionals have a positive effect on student success as shown by the studies conducted by Gartner, Jackson and Riessman (1977) and Fafard (1977). It is imperative that school districts in Nebraska understand how paraprofessional training impacts paraprofessional performance and how that translates into improved student achievement and performance. A clear understanding of the connection between the two can assist decision-makers in making choices that will best benefit students.



Further investigation should also be performed in the area of “on the job training” through interviews with teachers and paraprofessionals. Data could reveal the amount of “on the job training” that is actually taking place as well as ways to improve this method of training.

### Summary

Paraprofessionals are taking an increasingly important role in our special education programs. It is imperative that educational leaders understand the role of the paraprofessional so that they can assist them in being effective in our schools. This study shows that more paraprofessional training is needed and identifies specific topic areas of greatest need, as identified by paraprofessionals, special education teachers and building principals and assistant principals. Proper training can lead to increased production and results. The information from this study needs to be disseminated to school districts in the state of Nebraska. Each school district and school building should develop a systematic procedure for implementing paraprofessional training to assure that adequate training is occurring. If all paraprofessionals working in Nebraska special education programs were effectively trained, the effects could be significant. Most importantly, the services provided in Nebraska special education programs would improve and our students would be the beneficiaries.

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**Appendix A**

**Nebraska State Statute**

**Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-1233**

## Nebraska State Statute

Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-1233. Nebraska certificate; prerequisite to teaching; employment of teacher aids; requirements; junior colleges, not required.

(1) No person shall be employed to teach in any public, private, denominational, or parochial school in this state who does not hold a valid Nebraska certificate or permit issued by the Commissioner of Education legalizing him to teach the grade or subjects to which elected,...

(2) Public, private, denominational, or parochial schools in the state may employ persons who do not hold a valid Nebraska teaching certificate or permit issued by the Commissioner of Education to serve as aids to a teacher or teachers. Such teacher aides may not assume any teaching responsibilities. A teacher aide may be assigned duties which are non-teaching in nature if the employing school has assured itself that the aide has been specifically prepared for such duties, including the handling of emergency situations which might arise in the course of his work. (LB 655, Sessions Laws 1969)

**Appendix B**

**Nebraska State Statute**

**Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-101**

## Nebraska State Statute

**Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-101...the term teacher shall mean any certified employee who is regularly employed for the instruction of pupils in public schools,...Terms defined. As used in Chapter 79(13) the term teach shall mean and include, but not be limited to, the following responsibilities: (a) The organization and management of the classroom or the physical area in which the learning experiences of pupils take place, b) the assessment and diagnosis of the individual educational needs of the pupils, (c) the planning, selecting, organizing, prescribing and directing of the learning experiences of pupils, (d) the planning of teaching strategies and the selection of available materials and equipment to be used, and (e) the evaluation and reporting of student progress. (L 997, Session Laws 1971)**

**Appendix C**

**Nebraska Department of Education Position Paper for Schools (July 1971)**

**Teacher Aides in Nebraska Schools**

Nebraska Department of Education Position Paper for Schools (July 1971)

TEACHER AIDES IN NEBRASKA SCHOOLS

Clarification and Interpretation

The passage of LB 655, Sessions Laws 1969, makes it permissible for Nebraska schools to employ non-certificated teacher aides. This law, which amends school law 79-1233 reads:

- (1) No person shall be employed to teach in any public, private, denominational, or parochial school in this state who does not hold a valid Nebraska certificate or permit issued by the State Board of Education legalizing him to teach the grade or subjects to which elected, except that no Nebraska certificate or permit shall be required of persons teaching exclusively in junior college organized as part of the public school system.
- (2) Public, private, denominational, or parochial schools in the state may employ persons who do not hold a valid Nebraska teaching certificate or permit issued by the Commissioner of Education to serve as aides to a teacher or teachers. Such teacher aides may not assume any teaching responsibilities. A teacher aide may be assigned duties which are non-teaching in nature, if the employing school has assured itself that the aide has been specifically prepared for such duties, including the handling of emergency situations which might arise in the course of his work.

LB 997, Session Laws 1971, defines the meaning of the term "teach" by enumerating examples of responsibilities that are truly teaching responsibilities, and which, accordingly, may not be assumed by teacher aides. Thus the role and function of teacher aides is clarified through a process of stating responsibilities. This law, which amends school law 79-101 by adding sub-section (12) reads: "(12) the term teach means and includes, but is not limited to, the following responsibilities: (a) The organization and management of the classroom or the physical area in which the learning experiences of pupils take place, (b) the assessment and diagnosis of the individual educational needs of the pupils, (c) the planning, selecting, organizing, prescribing, and directing of the learning experiences of pupils, (d) the planning of teaching strategies and the selection of available materials and equipment to be used, and (e) the evaluation and reporting of student progress."

Only persons employed to teach who hold a valid Nebraska teaching certificate or



permit may perform the professional responsibilities as defined by this amendment. The aide's role is primarily to assist the teacher so that the teacher can carry out his responsibilities in a more efficient and effective manner. A non-certificated aide may not, under any circumstances, replace the classroom teacher. He may not be assigned to undertake any of the teacher's professional responsibilities.

Activities carefully defined by the teacher which do not require an aide to initiate a pedagogical judgment may be conducted by an aide under the direction of the teacher. The function of the teacher aide could be considered a part of the learning prescription as determined by the certificated teacher.

Few formal teacher aide training programs are currently available in Nebraska. However, formal training is generally not considered a necessity in the preparation of teacher aides. Personnel employed to serve as teacher aides must, however, be provided appropriate pre-service and/or in-service training. It is imperative that the training program provide the aide with a thorough understanding of the operating procedures and policies of the role of the aide, the role of the teacher, and the roles of others with whom the aide will be working. Instruction and practice in performing certain specific tasks, such as keeping records and reports, operating machines, and other routine duties which the aides will probably be expected to perform would be most beneficial. Teachers who will be utilizing the services of aides should be directly involved in the selection of aides, in planning the aide training program, and should participate in appropriate portions of the program.

Nebraska is fortunate in having many people with specific talents, interests and abilities who are willing and capable of contributing to the education of our youth. The teacher aide law provides schools the opportunity to tap this tremendous resource. The success of the program will depend greatly upon thorough planning and ingenuity at the local school district level.

**Appendix D**

**Nebraska Professional Practices Commission Statement**

**Teacher Aides: A Position Statement (1977)**

**Nebraska Professional Practices Commission Statement**

**Teacher Aides: A Position Statement (1977)**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE USE OF TEACHER AIDES**

**Foreword**

In Nebraska there seems to be much uncertainty regarding the proper use of teacher aides. The Professional Practices Commission perceives a need to clarify the use of teacher aides in light of the Standards of Professional Performance. A position paper on teacher aides was first published by the PPC in 1971. Since then the Commission has amended its Rules and Regulations. This paper is being issued in accordance with the 1977 amendments to the PPC Rules and Regulations.

During the preparation of the 1971 position statement, the U.S. Office of Education's Office of Information Dissemination was consulted. IN its paper entitled "Roles and Functions of Aides," the office cited Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Oregon as having exemplary guidelines on this topic. The Commission secured copies of these guidelines from the states mentioned, and relied significantly upon them whenever their guidelines seemed to the Commission to be compatible with Nebraska statutes and the PPC Rules and Regulations.

Each educator subject to the PPC standards should be aware of the PPC's position on teacher aides. It is hoped boards of education and members of the teaching profession will accept these guidelines as a sincere effort to promote improvement of education and the teaching profession.

Teaching is defined in Nebraska law as follows:

79-101 (13): the term teach shall mean and include, but not be limited to, the following responsibilities: (a) the organization and management of the classroom or the physical area in which the learning experiences of pupils take place, (b) the assessment and diagnosis of the individual educational needs of the pupils, (c) the planning, selecting, organizing , prescribing, and directing of the learning experiences of pupils, (d) the planning of teaching strategies and the selection of available materials and equipment to be used, and (e) the evaluation and reporting of student progress.

1. Q. Are there any statelaws regarding teacher aides?  
A. Yes. The law is as follows:

79-1233 (2): Public, private, denominational, or parochial schools in the statemay employ persons who do not hold a valid Nebraska teaching certificate or permit issued by the Commissioner of Education to serve as aides to a teacher or teachers. Such teacher aides may not assume any teaching responsibilities. A teacher aide may be assigned duties which are non-teaching in nature, if the employing school has assured itself that the aide has been specifically prepared for such duties, including the handling of emergency situations which might arise in the course of his work.

2. Q. What guidelines do educators have for the use of aides?  
 A. The Nebraska StateBoard of Education, with the counsel of the Professional Practices Commission, has adopted the Standards of Ethical and Professional Performance. Two provisions of the Standards apply to the topic at hand:  
 In fulfillment of the obligation to professional employment practices, the educator—  
     Shall apply for, accept, offer, or assign a position or responsibility on the basis of professional preparation and legal qualifications.  
     Shall not delegate assigned tasks to unqualified personnel.  
 In fulfillment of the obligation to the profession, the educator—  
     Shall practice the profession only with proper certification, and shall actively oppose the practice of the profession by persons known to be unqualified.
3. Q. Why is the Professional Practices Commission concerned about the use of teacher aides?  
 A. Teachers, administrators, and parents have expressed their concern to the Commission that aides are being misused. Students are the chief concern of the educational system. If, indeed, there do exist situations in which aides or any other personnel are misassigned, students are the losers. The education professional must assume StateStatutes and the Standards of Ethical and Professional Performance have a valid basis, and live up to them. One of the Commission’s purposes is to assist educators in this endeavor.
4. Q. If there are abuses in the assignment of teacher aides, why isn’t something done about it?  
 A. People probably are not aware that misuse of aides is in violation of Statelaw and may even be contrary to the Standards of Ethical and Professional Performance.

5. Q. What duties may aides perform?  
A. They may perform any duties except those requiring professional judgment. Section 79-101 (13) defines "teaching." These responsibilities must be met by a teacher and cannot be delegated to an aide. The NPPC has not compiled a list of approved teacher aide tasks. Although the teacher aide will in fact do routine tasks, any arbitrary allocation of the work in the classroom to aide and teacher is unrealistic. What is important is that the teacher be established in a role of leadership and responsibility, and that the teacher aide be established in a supportive role.
6. Q. Are job descriptions for each aide position desirable?  
A. The Commission believes the use of a job description for each aide position would do much to dispel the uncertainty and tension surrounding this issue.
7. Q. May a school district hire aides to replace classroom teachers, and thus effect budgetary savings?  
A. No. There seems to be no doubt about this. The July, 1971, Nebraska State Department of Education memorandum states, "A non-certificated aide may not, under any circumstances, replace the classroom teacher."
8. Q. Should aides be hired under a contract which sets forth their duties?  
A. No. A written policy statement governing the employment and assignment of aides is preferable. This in conjunction with job descriptions should accomplish the same end. Contractual hiring should be limited to teachers and administrators.
9. Q. May aides be assigned to playground supervision, bus loading stations, cafeterias, or study halls?  
A. Teacher aides who are competent, mature and familiar with what would be reasonable care in meeting the management responsibilities of such an assignment may supervise such activities subject to local district policy.
10. Q. May children be left in the care of teacher aides without the district or its personnel risking liability?  
A. The issue of liability does not rest on certification by on whether the responsible and assigned individuals in charge carry out their responsibilities in a manner demonstrating reasonable care and normal precaution.
11. Q. May an aide be the sole adult manning an instructional station?  
A. An aide may assist a teacher in instruction in subject matter or in conducting instructional activities. The teacher shall be continuously aware

of the aide's instructional activities, and must be able to control or modify them.

12. Q. May a person who holds a valid teaching certificate be employed as an aide?  
 A. Yes. If the individual agrees to be employed as an aide and the school wants to hire him/her as such, the parties are free to enter into such an agreement. However, such a person should not be assigned teaching responsibilities.
13. Q. Why should a district not assign teaching responsibilities to an aide who holds a valid teaching certificate?  
 A. For the protection of students. Under such an arrangement, the students would be placed in a situation where no one is responsible for their learning. Only a teacher may assume the responsibilities set forth in Sec. 79-101 (13); an aide cannot be held accountable for meeting these responsibilities. If the employing district believes the certificated person is qualified and should be assigned to meet the responsibilities of teaching (Sec. 79-101 (13)), the district should hire him/her under a regular teaching contract. To hire someone as an aide and then expect him/her to assume responsibilities for another position is unfair to all parties concerned. If a certificated person agrees to employment as an aide, holding a teaching certificate is incidental to employment as an aide. Therefore, a person employed as an aide, who happens to hold a teaching credential, must aid, not teach.
14. Q. May a principal or superintendent serve as school librarian by assigning a teacher aide to a library instructional media center to serve under his/her supervision?  
 A. No. The teacher aide may not be used in lieu of certificated personnel.
15. Q. May a teacher aide be assigned to a classroom to serve in lieu of a teacher under supervision of a building principal, an adjacent or nearby classroom teacher, or the supervisor?  
 A. No. The teacher aide may not be used in lieu of certificated personnel.
16. Q. Suppose a person believes his school is misassigning or misusing aides. What should he do about it?  
 A. (1) Contact local school officials and request the situation be corrected. If the results of this contact are unsatisfactory,  
 (2) initiate some type of formal action, such as:  
 (a) filing a signed complaint with the Professional Practices Commission in cases where an educator is responsible for the allegedly unethical assignment;

- (b) making a request to the State Department of Education to take appropriate action, or
- (c) filing a legal action in court.

**Appendix E**

**IRB Letter**





Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
 Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)  
 University of Nebraska Medical Center  
 Eppley Science Hall 3018  
 986810 Nebraska Medical Center  
 Omaha, NE 68198-6810  
 (402) 559-6463  
 Fax: (402) 559-7845  
 E-mail: [irbora@unmc.edu](mailto:irbora@unmc.edu)  
<http://www.unmc.edu/irb>

March 9, 2000

Enid Ann Schonewise  
 10484 Ruggels Plz  
 Omaha, NE 68134

**IRB#: 082-00-EX**

**TITLE OF PROTOCOL: Training of Paraprofessionals in Special Education Programs in Nebraska**

Dear Ms. Schonewise:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of five years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the five year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Ernest D. Prentice'.

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.  
 Co-Chair, IRB

lw

**Appendix F**  
**Initial Request Letter**

**TO:** NASES Active Member  
**RE:** Survey on Special Education Paraprofessional Training

I am a doctoral candidate in the UNL/UNO joint doctoral program under the advisement of Dr. Martha Bruckner. I am requesting your assistance and input as I am completing my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to assess paraprofessional training for paraprofessionals who work in Special Education. I will be looking at the perceived current training practices and training needs. I will be analyzing information gathered from paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals/assistant principals who work with Special Education students.

I am requesting the assistance of all members of the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors. I have received support from your president, Sandra Peterson, ESU 3. Upon completion of my study, I would be happy to provide you with the survey results.

If you are willing to have your district participate in the study by having paraprofessionals, special education teachers, principals and assistant principals in your district complete an anonymous, 40-question survey, please complete the attached form below and return it to me in the prepaid mailer. I will then send you the appropriate amount of surveys needed. I would ask that you distribute and collect all surveys and return them to me in an enclosed prepaid mailer. You will not be asked to complete a survey.

With the shortage of special education teachers upon us, we must learn more about the use and training of paraprofessionals. This study will provide Nebraska special educators with valuable information in regards to paraprofessional training that could assist us in improving the learning process. Please take the time to have your district participate.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (402) 898-0400.

Sincerely,

Enid Schonewise

-----  
 Please return the bottom portion in the prepaid mailer within two weeks.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position/Title \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Special Education Teachers' surveys needed  
 (Special Education Teachers who work with Paraprofessionals) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Paraprofessionals' surveys needed  
 (Paraprofessionals who work in Special Education) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Administrators' surveys needed  
 (Building administrators who work with Special Education Paraprofessionals) \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like a copy of the survey results? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix G**

**Vasa, Steckelberg, and Ronning' 1982 Survey Advisory Committee Members**

**VASA, STECKELBERG, AND RONNINGS' 1982 SURVEY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**Richard Schoonover  
Bellevue Public Schools**

**Martin Heflebower  
Sand Hills Cooperative**

**Broken Bow**

**Tom Fortune  
Lincoln Public Schools**

**Irv Ross  
Educational Service Unit #9**

**Hastings**

**Carol McClain  
Beatrice Public Schools**

**Mary Ann Losh  
Nebraska Department of Education**

**STAFF**

**Stanley F. Vasa  
Associate Professor  
Accommodate  
Department of Special Education  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, NE 68583**

**Allen L. Steckelberg  
Project  
Department of Special Education  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, NE 68583**

**Laura Ulrich Ronning  
Research Associate  
Department of Special Education  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, NE 68583**

**Appendix H**  
**Building Administrators Survey**

**TO: Building Administrators who have special education programs  
and paraprofessionals in their buildings**

**RE: Survey Request**

I am a doctoral candidate in the UNL/UNO joint doctoral program. I am requesting your assistance and input as I am completing my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to assess paraprofessional training for paraprofessionals who work in Special Education. I will be looking at the perceived current training practices and the perceived training needed. I will be analyzing information gathered from paraprofessionals, Special Education teachers, and building administrators who work with Special Education students.

With the shortage of Special Education teachers upon us, we must learn more about the use and training of paraprofessionals. This study will provide Nebraska Special Educators with valuable information in regards to paraprofessional training that could assist us in improving the learning process. Please circle one answer per question. Begin with question one on the survey and complete the entire survey. Return to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed the survey as soon as possible

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

**Enid Schonewise**

**Survey of Perceived Paraprofessional Training in Nebraska  
Special Education Building Administrators Survey**

**Definition of terms:**

A paraprofessional shall be defined as an individual employed by a public, private, denominational or parochial school to serve as an aide to a teacher or teachers (79-1233(2) Nebraska statutes). This definition shall also include an individual employed as an instructional, transportation aide and aide serving orthopedic, visually, acoustically, and speech-impaired students.

Educational Agency/School District for the purposes of this survey shall refer to a school, school district, or Educational Service Unit.

---

**Part I:**

**Please circle one answer per question. Begin with question one on the survey and complete the entire survey. Please return the survey, when completed, to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed it.**

1. Are there paraprofessionals in your special education department?
- A. Yes
  - B. No

**IF "NO", DO NOT CONTINUE WITH THE REST OF THE SURVEY, RETURN TO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR WHO DISTRIBUTED THE SURVEY.**

2. Do you feel that paraprofessionals improve students' learning in your district?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
  - C. Unsure

3. Approximately how many clock hours of ongoing formal training/in-service are provided specifically for paraprofessionals in a school year in your Educational Agency/School District?
- A. 0 to 1
  - B. 2 to 5
  - C. 6 to 10
  - D. 11 to 19
  - E. 20 or more

4. How informed are you about the state and federal training requirements for paraprofessionals?
- A. Not informed
  - B. Informed
  - C. Extremely informed

**IF YOU ANSWERED "NOT INFORMED" TO #4, DO NOT ANSWER #5, GO TO #6.**

5. Do you feel your Educational Agency/School District's training program for paraprofessionals, meets state and federal requirements?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
  - C. Do not know



For the next three questions please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your Educational Agency/School District's current practice for each item.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Current Practice (What you believe is currently being done in your Educational Agency/School District)

6. Initial training is provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                                 A         B         C         D         E

7. Ongoing training/in-service is provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                                 A         B         C         D         E

8. Paraprofessionals attend training/in-service outside your Educational Agency/School District  
 i.e., community college, web based)                                 A         B         C         D         E

For the next three questions, please circle the corresponding number on a continuum which best reflects your perceived need for each item of A-E (A=always to E=never)

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Perceived Need (What you believe should be done in your Educational Agency/School District)

9. Initial training should be provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                                 A         B         C         D         E

10. Ongoing training/in-service should be provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                                 A         B         C         D         E

11. Paraprofessionals should attend training/in-service outside your Educational Agency/School District  
 (i.e., community college, web based)                                 A         B         C         D         E

For the next several topic questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your Educational Agency/School District current practice for providing training about the topic.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Current Practice (What you believe is currently being done in your Educational Agency/School District)

Topics included as part of paraprofessional training in your Educational Agency/School District:

12. school policies	A	B	C	D	E
13. legal and ethical issues	A	B	C	D	E
14. job role expectations and responsibilities	A	B	C	D	E
15. knowledge of disabling conditions	A	B	C	D	E
16. behavior management/physical control	A	B	C	D	E
17. tutoring techniques	A	B	C	D	E
18. observing/recording and reporting student behavior	A	B	C	D	E
19. instructional materials	A	B	C	D	E
20. equipment operation	A	B	C	D	E
21. first aid/safety	A	B	C	D	E
22. job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)	A	B	C	D	E

## Administrator Survey

For the next several topic questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your Educational Agency/School District's perceived need for each item.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Perceived Need (What topics you believe should be included in your Educational Agency/School

Topics that should be included as part of paraprofessional training in your Educational Agency/School District:

23. school policies	A	B	C	D	E
24. legal and ethical issues	A	B	C	D	E
25. job role expectations and responsibilities	A	B	C	D	E
26. knowledge of disabling conditions	A	B	C	D	E
27. behavior management/physical control	A	B	C	D	E
28. tutoring techniques	A	B	C	D	E
29. observing/recording and reporting student behavior	A	B	C	D	E
30. instructional materials	A	B	C	D	E
31. equipment operation	A	B	C	D	E
32. first aid/safety	A	B	C	D	E
33. job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)	A	B	C	D	E

34. Do you feel that paraprofessionals should be required to undergo some type of training program as a prerequisite to employment in special education programs?

- A. Yes
- B. No

35. Do you feel special education teachers need training in utilizing paraprofessionals?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

36. How many years have you been employed as a special education administrator?

- A. 0-2
- B. 3-5
- C. 6-8
- D. 9-12
- E. More than 12

37. What is your gender?

- A. Male
- B. Female

38. In which type of special education program do you administrate?

- A. Elementary
- B. Secondary
- C. K-12

39. With which Educational Service Unit are you affiliated? \_\_\_\_\_

Write in

---

**Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses to this survey will be held in confidence. Please return the completed survey to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed the survey.**

**Appendix I**  
**Special Education Teacher Survey**

**TO: Special Education Teachers who work with paraprofessionals**

**RE: Survey Request**

I am a doctoral candidate in the UNL/UNO joint doctoral program. I am requesting your assistance and input as I am completing my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to assess paraprofessional training for paraprofessionals who work in Special Education. I will be looking at the perceived current training practices and the perceived training needed. I will be analyzing information gathered from paraprofessionals, Special Education teachers, and building administrators who work with Special Education students.

With the shortage of Special Education teachers upon us, we must learn more about the use and training of paraprofessionals. This study will provide Nebraska Special Educators with valuable information in regards to paraprofessional training that could assist us in improving the learning process. Please circle one answer per question. Begin with question one on the survey and complete the entire survey. Return to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed the survey as soon as possible

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

**Enid Schonewise**

**Survey of Perceived Paraprofessional Training in Nebraska**  
**Special Education Teacher Survey**

**Definition of terms:**

A paraprofessional shall be defined as an individual employed by a public, private, denominational or parochial school to serve as an aide to a teacher or teachers (79-1233(2) Nebraska statutes). This definition shall also include an individual employed as an instructional, transportation aide and aide serving orthopedic, visually, acoustically, and speech-impaired students.

Educational Agency/School District for the purposes of this survey shall refer to a school, school district or Educational Service Unit.

**Part I:**

**Please circle one answer per question. Begin with question one on the survey and complete the entire survey. Please return the survey, when completed, to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed it.**

1. Are there paraprofessionals in your special education department?  
 A. Yes  
 B. No

**IF "NO", DO NOT CONTINUE WITH THE REST OF THE SURVEY, RETURN TO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR WHO ADMINISTERED THE SURVEY.**

2. Do you feel that paraprofessionals improve students' learning in your district?  
 A. Yes  
 B. No  
 C. Unsure

3. Approximately how many clock hours of ongoing formal training/in-service are provided specifically for paraprofessionals in a school year in your Educational Agency/School District?  
 A. 0 to 1  
 B. 2 to 5  
 C. 6 to 10  
 D. 11 to 19  
 E. 20 or more

4. How informed are you about the state and federal training requirements for paraprofessionals?  
 A. Not informed  
 B. Informed  
 C. Extremely informed

**IF YOU ANSWERED "NOT INFORMED" TO #4, DO NOT ANSWER #5, GO TO #6.**

5. Do you feel your Educational Agency/School District's training program for paraprofessionals meets state and federal requirements?  
 A. Yes  
 B. No  
 C. Do not know the Educational Agency/School District's program

For the next three questions please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect the Educational Agency/School District's current practice for each item.

- A = Always
- B = Often
- C = Sometimes
- D = Seldom
- E = Never

Current Practice (What you believe is currently being done in the Educational Agency/School District)

6. Initial training provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                  A        B        C        D        E

7. Ongoing training/in-service is provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                  A        B        C        D        E

8. Paraprofessionals attend training/in-service outside your Educational Agency/School District (i.e . community college, web based)                  A        B        C        D        E

For the next three questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum to best reflect the perceived need for each item of A-E (A=always to E=never)

- A = Always
- B = Often
- C = Sometimes
- D = Seldom
- E = Never

Perceived Need (What you believe should be done in your Educational Agency/School District)

9. Initial training should be provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                  A        B        C        D        E

10. Ongoing training/in-service should be provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District                  A        B        C        D        E

11. Paraprofessionals should attend training/in-service outside your Educational Agency/School District (i.e., community college, web based)                  A        B        C        D        E



For the next several topic questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your Educational Agency/School District's current practice for providing training about the topic.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Current Practice (What you believe is currently being done in your Educational Agency/School District)

Topics included as part of paraprofessional training in your Educational Agency/School District:

12. school policies	A	B	C	D	E
13. legal and ethical issues	A	B	C	D	E
14. job role expectations and responsibilities	A	B	C	D	E
15. knowledge of disabling conditions	A	B	C	D	E
16. behavior management/physical control	A	B	C	D	E
17. tutoring techniques	A	B	C	D	E
18. observing/recording and reporting student behavior	A	B	C	D	E
19. instructional materials	A	B	C	D	E
20. equipment operation	A	B	C	D	E
21. first aid/safety	A	B	C	D	E
22. job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)	A	B	C	D	E

For the next several topic questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your perceived need for each item in your Educational Agency/School District.

- A = Always
- B = Often
- C = Sometimes
- D = Seldom
- E = Never

Perceived Need (What you believe should be done in your Educational Agency/School District)

Topics that should be included as part of paraprofessional training in your Educational Agency/School District:

23. school policies	A	B	C	D	E
24. legal and ethical issues	A	B	C	D	E
25. job role expectations and responsibilities	A	B	C	D	E
26. knowledge of disabling conditions	A	B	C	D	E
27. behavior management/physical control	A	B	C	D	E
28. tutoring techniques	A	B	C	D	E
29. observing/recording and reporting student behavior	A	B	C	D	E
30. instructional materials	A	B	C	D	E
31. equipment operation	A	B	C	D	E
32. first aid/safety	A	B	C	D	E
33. job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)	A	B	C	D	E

34. Do you feel that paraprofessionals should be required to undergo some type of training program as a prerequisite to employment in special education programs?

- A. Yes
- B. No

35. Do you feel Special Education teachers need training in utilizing paraprofessionals?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

36. How many years have you been employed as a Special Education teacher?

- A. 0-2
- B. 3-5
- C. 6-8
- D. 9-12
- E. More than 12

37. What is your gender?

- A. Male
- B. Female

38. In which type of special education program do you teach?

- A. Elementary
- B. Secondary
- C. K-12

39. With which Educational Service Unit are you affiliated? \_\_\_\_\_

Write in

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Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses to this survey will be held in confidence. Please return the completed survey and to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed the survey.

**Appendix J**  
**Paraprofessional Survey**

**TO: Paraprofessionals working in Special Education**

**RE: Survey Request**

I am a doctoral candidate in the UNL/UNO joint doctoral program. I am requesting your assistance and input as I am completing my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to assess paraprofessional training for paraprofessionals who work in Special Education. I will be looking at the perceived current training practices and the perceived training needed. I will be analyzing information gathered from paraprofessionals, Special Education teachers, and building administrators who work with Special Education students.

With the shortage of Special Education teachers upon us, we must learn more about the use and training of paraprofessionals. This study will provide Nebraska Special Educators with valuable information in regards to paraprofessional training that could assist us in improving the learning process. Please circle one answer per question. Begin with question one on the survey and complete the entire survey. Return to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed the survey as soon as possible

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

**Enid Schonewise**

**Survey of Perceived Paraprofessional Training in Nebraska  
Special Education Paraprofessional Survey**

**Definition of terms:**

A paraprofessional shall be defined as an individual employed by a public, private, denominational or parochial school to serve as an aide to a teacher or teachers (79-1233(2) Nebraska statutes). This definition shall also include an individual employed as an instructional, transportation aide and aide serving orthopedic, visually, acoustically, and speech-impaired students.

Educational Agency/School District for the purposes of this survey shall refer to a school, school district or Educational Service Unit.

**Part I:**

**Please circle one answer per question. Begin with question one on the survey and complete the entire survey. Please return the survey, when completed, to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed it.**

1. Do you work in a special education department?

- A. Yes
- B. No

**IF "NO", DO NOT CONTINUE WITH THE REST OF THE SURVEY, RETURN TO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR WHO ADMINISTERED THE SURVEY.**

2. Do you feel that paraprofessionals improve students' learning in your district?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

3. Approximately how many clock hours of ongoing formal training/in-service are provided specifically for paraprofessionals in a school year in your Educational Agency/School District?

- A. 0 to 1
- B. 2 to 5
- C. 6 to 10
- D. 11 to 19
- E. 20 or more

4. How informed are you about the state and federal training requirements for paraprofessionals?

- A. Not informed
- B. Informed
- C. Extremely informed

**IF YOU ANSWERED "NOT INFORMED" TO #4, DO NOT ANSWER #5, GO TO #6.**

5. Do you feel the Educational Agency/School District's training program for paraprofessionals meets state and federal requirements?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

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For the next three questions please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect the current practice in the Educational Agency/School District.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Current Practice (What you believe is currently being done in the Educational Agency/School District)

6. Initial training is provided for paraprofessionals by your educational agency      A      B      C      D      E
7. Ongoing training/in-service is provided for paraprofessionals by your educational agency      A      B      C      D      E
8. Paraprofessionals attend training/in-service outside your educational agency (i.e., community college, web based)      A      B      C      D      E

---

For the next three questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your perceived need for each item.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Perceived Need (What you believe should be done in the Educational Agency/School District)

9. Initial training should be provided for paraprofessionals by the Educational Agency/School District      A      B      C      D      E
10. Ongoing training/in-service should be provided for paraprofessionals by the Educational Agency/School District      A      B      C      D      E
11. Paraprofessionals should attend training/in-service outside the Educational Agency/School District (i.e., community college, web based)      A      B      C      D      E

For the next several topic questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your Educational Agency/School District's current practice for providing training about the topic.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Topics that are included as part of paraprofessional training in the Educational Agency/School District:

Current Practice (What you believe is currently being done in the Educational Agency/School District)

12. school policies	A	B	C	D	E
13. legal and ethical issues	A	B	C	D	E
14. job role expectations and responsibilities	A	B	C	D	E
15. knowledge of disabling conditions	A	B	C	D	E
16. behavior management/physical control	A	B	C	D	E
17. tutoring techniques	A	B	C	D	E
18. observing/recording and reporting student behavior	A	B	C	D	E
19. instructional materials	A	B	C	D	E
20. equipment operation	A	B	C	D	E
21. first aid/safety	A	B	C	D	E
22. job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)	A	B	C	D	E



For the next several topic questions, please circle the corresponding letter on a continuum of A-E (A=always to E=never) to best reflect your Educational Agency/School District's perceived need for each item.

A = Always  
 B = Often  
 C = Sometimes  
 D = Seldom  
 E = Never

Perceived Need (What you believe should be done in the Educational Agency/School District)

Topics that should be included as part of paraprofessional training in the Educational Agency/School District:

23. school policies	A	B	C	D	E
24. legal and ethical issues	A	B	C	D	E
25. job role expectations and responsibilities	A	B	C	D	E
26. knowledge of disabling conditions	A	B	C	D	E
27. behavior management/physical control	A	B	C	D	E
28. tutoring techniques	A	B	C	D	E
29. observing/recording and reporting student behavior	A	B	C	D	E
30. instructional materials	A	B	C	D	E
31. equipment operation	A	B	C	D	E
32. first aid/safety	A	B	C	D	E
33. job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)	A	B	C	D	E

34. Do you feel that paraprofessionals should be required to undergo some type of training program as a prerequisite to employment in special education programs?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

35. Do you feel special education teachers need training in utilizing paraprofessionals?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

36. How many years have you been employed as a special education paraprofessional?

- A. 0-2
- B. 3-5
- C. 6-8
- D. 9-12
- E. More than 12

37. What is your gender?

- A. Male
- B. Female

38. In which type of special education program do you teach?

- A. Elementary
- B. Secondary
- C. K-12

39. With which Educational Service Unit are you affiliated? \_\_\_\_\_

Write in

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Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses to this survey will be held in confidence. Please return the completed survey to the Special Education Director/Supervisor who distributed the survey.

**Appendix K**  
**Thank You Letter**

**TO: NASES Member and Paraprofessional Study Participant**

**RE: Special Education Paraprofessional Training**

**DATE: July 20, 2000**

I would once again like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. I understand that your time is precious and I appreciate your willingness to take time to distribute and collect the surveys.

There were 1056 completed surveys returned for a 55% overall return rate. This is an impressive rate.

I have enclosed a copy of the survey results in the form of percentage tables. I will be running specific statistical analysis using the data to complete my dissertation. When my dissertation is complete I will provide the NASES with a copy and abstract. I am hopeful that this information will be helpful to you as you make decisions in regards to your paraprofessional training.

Again, thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

**Enid Schonewise  
402 East Centennial Road  
Papillion, NE 68046  
402-898-0400**

**Appendix L**  
**Percentage Tables**

## 1. Are there paraprofessionals in your special education department?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Yes	98.4	99.8	98.6
No	0.8	0	0.2
Missing	0.8	0.2	1.2

## 2. Do you feel that paraprofessionals improve students' learning in your district?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Yes	97.6	95.2	98.1
No	0.8	0.5	0.2
Unsure	0.8	2.2	0.4
Missing	0.8	2.2	1.4

## 3. Approximately how many clock hours of ongoing formal training/in-service are provided specifically for paraprofessionals in a school year in your Educational Agency/School District?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
0 to 1	10.2	25.7	32.0
2 to 5	43.3	34.9	30.4
6 to 10	28.3	20.3	20.0
11 to 19	11.0	6.5	8.1
20 or more	3.9	4.8	4.1
Missing	3.1	7.7	5.4

## 4. How informed are you about the state and federal training requirements for paraprofessionals?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Not informed	53.5	67.8	74.4
Informed	40.9	29.8	24.4
Extremely informed	4.7	1.5	1.0
Missing	0.8	1.0	0.2

5. Do you feel your Educational Agency/School District's training program for paraprofessionals meets state and federal requirements?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Yes	27.6	16.9	12.8
No	7.9	7.0	4.5
Do not know	16.5	13.8	14.9
Missing	48	62.2	67.8

**Educational Agency/School District's current practice.**

6. Initial training provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	33.1	20.3	14.5
Often	29.9	14.3	12.2
Sometimes	18.1	24.2	25.6
Seldom	17.3	28.3	20.7
Never	0	11.1	26.2
Missing	1.6	1.7	0.8

7. Ongoing training/in-service is provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	23.6	11.1	13.0
Often	29.1	16.9	12.0
Sometimes	31.5	32.9	32.9
Seldom	13.4	29.5	26.0
Never	1.6	9.0	14.9
Missing	0.8	0.5	1.2

8. Paraprofessionals attend training/in-service outside your Educational Agency/School District (i.e., community college, web based)

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	4.7	1.2	1.2
Often	11.0	5.8	5.0
Sometimes	42.5	24.9	25.6
Seldom	33.9	39.5	27.3
Never	7.1	27.4	39.7
Missing	0.8	1.2	1.2

**Perceived Need for Educational Agency/School District**

9. Initial training should be provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	73.2	79.7	70.5
Often	22.0	15.3	18.4
Sometimes	3.9	4.6	10.1
Seldom	0.8	0.2	0.4
Never	0	0.2	0.4

10. Ongoing training/in-service should be provided for paraprofessionals by your Educational Agency/School District

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	59.8	60.3	52.1
Often	28.3	31.2	30.8
Sometimes	11.8	8.0	15.3
Seldom	0	0.5	1.6
Never	0	0	0.2



**11. Paraprofessionals should attend training/in-service outside your Educational Agency/School District (i.e., community college, web based)**

	<b>Building Principals</b>	<b>Special Education Teachers</b>	<b>Paraprofessionals</b>
<b>Always</b>	21.3	23.2	20.5
<b>Often</b>	15.7	20.1	20.5
<b>Sometimes</b>	52.0	49.4	49.4
<b>Seldom</b>	10.2	5.3	6.8
<b>Never</b>	0.8	1.9	2.7

Topics included as part of paraprofessional training in your Educational Agency/School District. Current practice (What you believe is currently being done in your Educational Agency/School District).

**12. School policies**

	<b>Building Principals</b>	<b>Special Education Teachers</b>	<b>Paraprofessionals</b>
<b>Always</b>	29.9	25.4	30.4
<b>Often</b>	26.8	20.6	20.5
<b>Sometimes</b>	23.6	33.2	23.1
<b>Seldom</b>	15.0	14.0	15.5
<b>Never</b>	1.6	5.1	9.5
<b>Missing</b>	3.1	1.7	1.0

**13. Legal and ethical issues**

	<b>Building Principals</b>	<b>Special Education Teachers</b>	<b>Paraprofessionals</b>
<b>Always</b>	25.2	18.9	23.8
<b>Often</b>	29.9	18.9	16.9
<b>Sometimes</b>	25.2	28.8	23.8
<b>Seldom</b>	15.0	23.5	20.3
<b>Never</b>	1.6	8.2	14.0
<b>Missing</b>	3.1	1.7	1.2

#### 14. Job role expectations and responsibilities

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	46.5	27.6	27.9
Often	30.7	28.8	24.8
Sometimes	16.5	29.3	28.3
Seldom	3.9	8.7	11.6
Never	0	2.9	7.0
Missing	2.4	2.7	0.4

#### 15. Knowledge of disabling conditions

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	17.3	10.9	11.8
Often	40.2	21.5	18.0
Sometimes	29.9	36.6	32.4
Seldom	9.4	22.0	22.5
Never	0.8	6.8	14.7
Missing	2.4	2.2	0.6

#### 16. Behavior management/physical control

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	20.5	11.4	13.4
Often	44.1	17.7	21.3
Sometimes	24.4	39.2	33.5
Seldom	7.9	22.8	19.8
Never	0	6.3	10.7
Missing	3.1	2.4	1.4

## 17. Tutoring techniques

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	11.8	6.8	8.3
Often	26.8	16.0	16.5
Sometimes	37.0	39.7	29.7
Seldom	17.3	26.4	23.6
Never	3.1	8.2	20.5
Missing	3.9	2.9	1.4

## 18. Observing/recording and reporting student behavior

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	13.4	9.2	14.3
Often	26.0	16.5	25.2
Sometimes	29.1	31.7	28.3
Seldom	23.6	29.8	18.0
Never	4.7	10.4	12.6
Missing	3.1	2.4	1.6

## 19. Instructional materials

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	7.9	7.3	10.9
Often	32.3	18.9	22.9
Sometimes	36.2	35.1	31.4
Seldom	19.7	25.7	19.4
Never	0.8	9.9	13.8
Missing	3.1	3.1	1.7

## 20. Equipment operation

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	18.1	9.2	12.4
Often	30.7	22.8	18.8
Sometimes	33.9	35.8	30.2
Seldom	13.4	21.8	20.0
Never	1.6	8.0	17.1
Missing	2.4	2.4	1.6

## 21. First aid/safety

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	18.1	18.2	23.1
Often	30.7	19.1	20.9
Sometimes	37.8	35.6	29.5
Seldom	9.4	18.2	15.1
Never	0	6.5	10.5
Missing	3.9	2.4	1.0

## 22. Job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	20.5	15.0	13.4
Often	38.6	20.8	20.5
Sometimes	24.4	37.8	31.2
Seldom	10.2	16.7	17.6
Never	3.1	7.3	15.3
Missing	3.1	2.4	1.9

Perceived need for each item in your Educational Agency/School District. Topics that should be included as part of paraprofessional training in your Educational Agency/School District).

### 23. School policies

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	53.5	64.2	58.3
Often	26.0	26.9	27.5
Sometimes	15.0	7.0	10.9
Seldom	3.9	1.5	1.7
Never	0	0	0.6
Missing	1.6	0.2	1.0

### 24. Legal and ethical issues

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	55.9	66.6	57.6
Often	33.9	24.2	26.2
Sometimes	7.1	8.0	12.8
Seldom	2.4	0.7	2.3
Never	0	0.2	1.0
Missing	0.8	0.2	0.2

### 25. Job role expectations and responsibilities

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	71.7	79.2	70.7
Often	23.6	17.7	20.5
Sometimes	3.9	2.4	6.0
Seldom	0	0.5	1.6
Never	0	0.2	0.8
Missing	0.8	0	0.4

## 26. Knowledge of disabling conditions

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	48.8	58.1	63.0
Often	37.8	33.7	24.8
Sometimes	11.8	8.0	8.1
Seldom	0.8	0.2	1.9
Never	0	0	1.4
Missing	0.8	0	0.8

## 27. Behavior management/physical control

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	62.2	68.0	65.9
Often	32.3	25.4	22.1
Sometimes	4.7	5.1	8.1
Seldom	0	1.0	2.1
Never	0	0	1.2
Missing	0.8	0.5	0.6

## 28. Tutoring techniques

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	44.1	52.5	47.5
Often	37.0	35.4	33.5
Sometimes	13.4	10.4	14.5
Seldom	3.1	0.7	2.3
Never	0	0.5	1.7
Missing	2.4	0.2	0.4

## 29. Observing/recording and reporting student behavior

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	39.4	48.7	52.7
Often	36.2	34.6	27.3
Sometimes	20.5	14.0	14.5
Seldom	3.1	1.7	2.9
Never	0	0.7	1.6
Missing	0.8	0.2	1.0

## 30. Instructional materials

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	29.9	39.2	47.9
Often	41.7	38.3	32.2
Sometimes	22.0	19.4	15.5
Seldom	5.5	2.2	2.3
Never	0	0.5	1.6
Missing	0.8	0.5	0.6

## 31. Equipment operation

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	38.6	46.0	46.1
Often	31.5	29.5	29.8
Sometimes	25.2	20.6	18.0
Seldom	3.9	3.4	3.1
Never	0	0.5	2.3
Missing	0.8	0	0.6

## 32. First aid/safety

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	58.3	64.4	63.0
Often	29.1	26.9	23.3
Sometimes	11.8	7.0	10.3
Seldom	0	1.2	2.3
Never	0	0.2	0.8
Missing	0.8	0.2	0.4

## 33. Job specific skills (i.e., interpreting, monitoring, transportation)

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Always	55.9	59.6	56.6
Often	31.5	27.8	25.8
Sometimes	9.4	10.2	12.4
Seldom	1.6	1.7	3.3
Never	0	0.5	1.0
Missing	1.6	0.2	1.0

Miscellaneous Questions

## 34. Do you feel that paraprofessionals should be required to undergo some type of training program as a prerequisite to employment in special education programs?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Yes	70.1	83.8	81.0
No	27.6	14.8	18.2
Missing	2.4	1.0	0.8



35. Do you feel Special Education teachers need training in utilizing paraprofessionals?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Yes	85.0	72.2	63.6
No	7.1	16.0	20.5
Missing	1.6	0.7	0.2

36. How many years have you been employed as a Special Education teacher?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
0-2	27.6	15.5	36.2
3-5	18.1	15.7	25.4
6-8	9.4	13.1	13.4
9-12	8.7	11.9	12.2
More than 12	28.3	43.6	12.4
Missing	7.9	0.2	0.4

37. What is your gender?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Male	61.4	8.0	2.1
Female	37.0	91.5	97.5
Missing	1.6	0.5	0.2

38. In which type of special education program do you teach?

	Building Principals	Special Education Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Elementary	33.9	42.9	51.6
Secondary	37.0	35.4	27.3
K-12	21.3	15.0	12.8
PreSchool	1.6	3.9	4.5
Elem, Second, K-12	N/A	1.0	0.2
Adult	N/A	N/A	0.4
Missing	6.3	1.9	3.1