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Perceptions of the Paraprofessional's Roles

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Perceptions of the Paraprofessional's Roles

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Abstract

This action research project was designed to survey the perceptions of special educators and paraprofessionals on the various paraprofessional roles and levels of training offered. The most common paraprofessional roles and types and amounts of training opportunities available were analyzed so that school districts would have the essential data to make programming decisions regarding the effectiveness of the paraprofessional programs within their schools. By using a survey process, paraprofessionals and special educators were asked a series of questions pertaining to the frequency of participation in each paraprofessional role, levels of formal and/or on-the-job training provided, and how the paraprofessionals' jobs impact the students and families they work with. The survey results revealed that the paraprofessional job roles in academics and behavior were most important areas. The importance of these job roles was established based on the highest levels of frequencies in each paraprofessional job role. Also, very little to minimal formal and on-the-job training was offered to paraprofessionals. This data will help school districts acknowledge the importance of planning for increased training opportunities.

Keywords: child with a disability, ESSA, IDEA, IEP, NCLB, paraprofessional

Chapter 1

Introduction

Picket (1989) has described various titles for the paraprofessional including: paraeducator, teacher aide, assistant, education technician, transition trainer, job coach, home visitor, and paraprofessional. These are some of the various titles that school districts are using to describe a group of individuals that have become common members of the special education team (Department of Education, 1999). According to Bitterman, Gray, and Goldring (as cited in Stockall, 2014), the increased demand for special education paraprofessionals has been substantiated by the growing numbers of paraprofessionals found across the nation. These authors state that in 2012, the number of special education paraprofessionals in public and charter schools in the U.S. was over 450,000 and continues to rise.

One of the main reasons for the increased need for paraprofessionals is that more students with disabilities are being educated in the general education classroom where they need additional supports to assist them (Wasburn-Moses, Chun, & Kaldenberg, 2013). Every student's educational placement and services should be determined on an individual basis according to their specific needs and be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE) which may include the general education classroom setting (Yell, 2016). Today, 57 percent of students with disabilities are in general education classrooms for 80 percent or more of their school day (U.S. Department of Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2010). Yell (2016) states that with so many students needing additional supports in the general education classroom, the increased need for paraprofessionals is fundamental because it helps ensure that students are educated in the LRE with the "use of supplementary aids and services (p. 243). Another reason for such a high demand of paraprofessionals is that the

shortage of special educators across the nation has intensified the need for carefully designed support from paraprofessionals (McGrath, Johns, & Mathur, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016), there are 416,798 full-time equivalent (FTE) paraprofessionals working with 378,614 FTE special education teachers in public schools across the country. By looking at these statistics, it is evident that special educators have become clearly outnumbered in comparison to the number of paraprofessionals.

With such an increased demand for paraprofessionals, it becomes important to delineate specific job roles and responsibilities that they will be expected to partake in (Department of Education, 1999). Pickett (1989) states that paraprofessionals provide instructional and other direct services to children and are supervised by teachers or other certified professionals (as cited in Department of Education, 1999). This description of the paraprofessional's job does not identify what exact roles are required to assist these children, and therefore; identifying the most important roles and examining the effectiveness of those roles in special education is an important topic to study.

Biggs et al. (2016) stress that strong collaboration skills between special educators and paraprofessionals can be beneficial when determining the most important job roles of the paraprofessional and can help ensure that paraprofessionals are aware of their job requirements. These authors state the need for special educators and paraprofessionals to maintain positive relationships and build effective communication skills to help improve and strengthen their working relationship. Biggs et al. (2016) emphasize how important "building and strengthening positive working relationships" (p. 256) can be to help ensure that students receive high quality educational experiences. A successful dynamic between the special educator and paraprofessional along with concise identification of paraprofessionals' roles, responsibilities,

and training will be valuable when establishing, implementing, and evaluating a successful special education program.

What are the specific job responsibilities and/or expectations of the paraprofessional? How and to what extent should the special educator supervise the paraprofessional? Does the paraprofessional have access to professional development opportunities and on the job training? In what ways are effective collaboration skills necessary to be a successful paraprofessional? This study attempts to answer many of these questions through a survey process with the compilation of perceptions of the special education teacher and paraprofessional when describing the role of the paraprofessional.

Statement of the Problem

The paraprofessionals' roles and expectations can vary greatly statewide and among school districts because each state has its very own set of specific standards for paraprofessional roles and responsibilities. According to the Department of Education (1999) in its 21st annual report to congress on the implementation of IDEA, as of 1999 fewer than half of the state departments of education had standards or guidelines for the employment, roles and duties, placement, supervision, and training of paraeducators. Although currently all states have implemented their own unique set of standards for employment and paraprofessional role descriptions, there are still inconsistencies in roles and training within each school and/or classroom. IDEA requires states to establish and maintain standards for all personnel providing services for young children and they must address training needs related to those standards, but the extent to which they regulate these standards, qualifications, and training of paraprofessionals varies (Appl, 2006, p. 36).

Specific and consistent job requirements and training methods are essential and can help paraprofessionals better understand what is expected of them when working together with the special education teacher to help students with disabilities attain their academic, social, and emotional, goals and objectives (Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2009). Once school districts can identify those successful roles, administrators can work on finding ways to make improvements within each of their schools by identifying important training needs and making sure that the educational requirements are appropriate for the paraprofessional to perform effectively. The ideal goal would be to create consistent guidelines among all states for paraprofessionals when identifying employment requirements, roles and duties, supervision by the special educator, and training of paraprofessionals that can be implemented nationwide.

Purpose of the Study

This study surveyed the current attitudes and perceptions of the special education teacher and paraprofessional on the paraprofessional's roles in special education. Paraprofessionals are given many roles throughout the day as part of their job assignment and finding out what roles are most common can help in determining what professional and/or on-the-job training opportunities the school districts should provide to their paraprofessional employees (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). This study surveyed which paraprofessional jobs are most frequently performed in many areas including assisting students with academics, helping with behavior interventions and supports, supporting students with physical disabilities and personal needs, and helping with clerical requirements.

Also, recent data continues to stress the importance of identifying the specific roles of the paraprofessionals because this helps to set boundaries for teachers and paraprofessionals when they are working with students with disabilities and helps guarantee that these students have an

opportunity to work with both professionals in the most effective ways possible (Giangreco et al., 2010). Establishing specific, recurrent paraprofessional roles can also help determine how and to what extent paraprofessionals will be assisting the special education teacher in helping students reach their goals and achieve success.

Questions of the Study

Two groups of participants (a) paraprofessionals and (b) special education teachers are examined for their perceptions on the most important paraprofessional job roles and quantity and types of training opportunities. The study is guided by focus questions given to each group as follows:

Paraprofessionals

1. What are the paraprofessionals' perceptions of the most important job roles based on their frequency of participation in each of those roles?
2. What are the paraprofessionals' perceptions of formal training preparation received to prepare them in each of their job roles?
3. What are the paraprofessionals' perceptions of on-the-job training preparation received to prepare them in each of their job roles?

Special education teachers

1. What are the special educators' perceptions when rating their most competent paraprofessional on performance in their job roles?
2. What are the special educators' perceptions of the most frequent roles their most competent paraprofessional partakes in?
3. What are the special educators' perceptions pertaining to the amount of on-the-job training they provide to their paraprofessionals?

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that the survey respondents were current special educators and/or paraprofessionals at either suburban or Chicago public schools at the elementary or high school levels. Another assumption is that the respondents answered the questions in an honest manner knowing that their identity would be anonymous and their responses would only be used to aid in the research of finding the most important paraprofessional roles and identifying training opportunities that need to be improved.

Due to the time constraints of the Governors State University research project, limitations were placed on the outcomes of this research project. The survey sample size was small and focused on a limited number of elementary and high schools in the suburbs and city of Chicago. Surveys were distributed through direct email contacts and by using a snowball sampling method where fellow classmates who were special educators and paraprofessionals helped distribute the survey to co-workers in their respective schools who were special educators and paraprofessionals.

Educational Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences in the ways that the paraprofessional's roles are viewed by the special educator and paraprofessional. By identifying and understanding these differing views, special educators and paraprofessionals will be more knowledgeable in identifying the most common and effective paraprofessional roles that will aid in assisting students with disabilities make academic, social, and emotional achievements and have the greatest positive impacts on special education. This study is beneficial because these perceptions and views can lead to the focus of specific areas

that need improvement including the paraprofessional's qualifications, job training, and levels of responsibility.

Also, this study helped identify perceptions of ongoing training opportunities through professional development and on-the-job opportunities that must be offered to paraprofessionals to help them perform their job roles effectively. Giangreco and Broer (2005) state that with IDEA 1997 including the requirement that paraprofessionals be appropriately trained and supervised, strengthening paraprofessional supports is of utmost importance (p. 10). Providing these opportunities will prepare paraprofessionals to be highly skilled and ready to carry out the tasks that they are asked to do (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Identifying the most common paraprofessional roles, training opportunities, and other ways that paraprofessionals can positively impact students with disabilities can assist administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals to identify what areas need improvements and plan for the best ways to ensure that the paraprofessional is an effective and integral part of their special education program.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for the clarification of this study:

Child with a Disability. In order to fully meet the definition (and eligibility for special education and related services) as a “child with a disability,” a child’s educational performance must be *adversely affected* due to the disability (Understanding the 13 categories of special education, n.d.). This site also states that IDEA identifies the 13 categories of disability to qualify for special education as: autism, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, including blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Department of Education, 2016). Zaleski (2016) states that ESSA enforced state standards in math, reading, language arts, and science and schools must acquire data to ensure that all subgroups of students continue making achievements in each of these areas. She emphasizes that specific interventions for low achieving schools are required, but overall greater flexibility in programming is given to individual states than was given with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The U.S. Department of Education (2017) states that ESSA now emphasizes supporting schools and districts with more choices to indicate student achievements by determining what weight academic and non-academic indicators will hold when reporting accountability for student success (p. 18). ESSA also includes Titles I-IX which provide many benefits to

paraprofessionals including increased professional development and teacher certification opportunities (Goss, 2016).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation and recognizing the value of personalized education and services for children and youth with diverse ability levels, learning styles, and other educational needs (Department of Education, 1999, p. III-4). IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Individualized Education Program (IEP). Yell (2016) describes that the purpose of the IEP is to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to every student in special education. According to this author, the IEP should include the goals of a student's program, the student's educational placement, special education and related services, and the evaluation and measurement criteria. Yell also states that the IEP is developed by school personnel and parent input to insure that a student's special education program will meet his/her needs and provide educational benefits.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 states that if paraprofessionals are working in an instructional setting and receiving Title 1 funds, they must have specific educational requirements that include: a minimum of two years of college coursework, earned at least an associate's degree, or must demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics instruction (Maggin et al., 2009).

The 2002 update of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—effectively scaled up the federal role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes and sought to advance

American competitiveness and close the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their more advantaged peers (Education Week, 2011). By the end of the 2005-06 school year, all school paraprofessionals hired with Title I money must have completed at least two years of college, obtained an associate's degree or higher, or passed an evaluation to demonstrate knowledge and teaching ability (Education Week, 2011).

Paraprofessional. French (1999) defines the paraprofessional as an individual who works “in a school in an instructional capacity alongside school professionals and is supervised by the certified or licensed professionals who hold ultimate responsibility for the student and programmatic outcomes” (as cited in Wasburn-Moses et al., 2013, p. 35). Griffin-Shirley and Matlock (2004) define paraprofessionals as teaching assistants who work to help with assisting special education teachers meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Chapter Summary

With the passage of Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities must be educated in the “least restrictive environment” and included in the regular classroom to the greatest extent possible where it would be beneficial to the student (Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004). According to Griffin-Shirley and Matlock (2004) and Breton (2010), the passage of this law created the need for paraprofessionals, but their duties, skills, and educational backgrounds were not clearly defined. Over the past couple of decades, the roles of paraprofessionals have changed from non-instructional tasks to increasingly instructional roles, but there are still differing opinions about which roles are appropriate (Giangreco, Smith, & Pinckney, 2006). With so many ambiguities and inconsistencies about the specific roles of paraprofessionals, it becomes essential to research the most efficient roles needed to assist

student with disabilities in the most effective capacity (Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udell, 2001).

Also important is appropriate formal and on-the-job training opportunities so that school districts can hire and maintain the most competent paraprofessionals in their schools. According to Killoran et al. (2001) few states have identified paraprofessional competencies or systematically trained them although they represent the largest group of personnel currently providing special education services (p.69). Methods to help improve communication between special educators and paraprofessionals and ensuring that special educators have the appropriate skills to supervise and train their paraprofessionals are essential elements that will help support paraprofessionals in obtaining the skills they need to assist students with disabilities to the highest capacity possible (Biggs et al., 2016).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Paraprofessionals in Special Education

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005), federal data indicate that as of 2005 about 390,000 paraprofessionals worked in special education and approximately 40% of states have more full time special education paraprofessionals than full time special educators (Giangreco et al., 2010). With the passage of PL 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the ability for children with disabilities to attend school in regular classrooms caused an increased need for hiring assistants to help special education teachers provide an education in the “least restrictive environment” (p. 127) or regular classroom environment for most (Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004). Hughes & Valle-Riestra (2008), state that the number of paraprofessionals continues to increase in the special and general education classrooms where they assist students with a wide range of disabilities in any of those classroom environments. These authors describe how schools have increasingly turned to paraprofessionals for assistance, with the largest numbers employed in the field of special education.

Often paraprofessionals must meet the multiple goals of assisting students with disabilities, supporting the work of the general and special educators, and being responsive to the requests from parents (Giangreco et al., 2006). Some of the activities that paraprofessionals are required to do include: reinforcing concepts originally presented by the teacher, assisting with the classroom behavior management program, monitoring children outside the classroom, and assisting in daily planning (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). These tasks, along with various others, may encompass many of the responsibilities and assignments that a paraprofessional is asked to partake in (National Education Association, 2017).

Following is a thorough explanation of the federal mandates that have impacted the paraprofessionals' roles and training requirements. These laws have helped to highlight the major job expectations required of the paraprofessional. According to Breton (2010), IDEA 2004 required that states ensure that all personnel needed to provide special education services should be adequately prepared and trained. Once these laws are defined, some of the most important job roles are described including academic instruction, behavior interventions, collaborator with parents, and various self-directed activities that paraprofessionals are sometimes expected to fulfill. After, these job roles are recognized, the importance of training is identified, including those training opportunities that occur under the direct supervision of the special education teacher. Breton (2010) specifically mentions the reauthorization of IDEA 2004 and how it mandates that paraprofessionals must be appropriately supervised when working with students. Finally, although paraprofessionals can have many positive impacts on helping students meet their goals, it is also important to understand that they can sometimes hinder their students' educational and social progress when these students become too overdependent on assistance from their paraprofessionals (Tews & Lupart, 2008).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), Public Law 94-142, of 1975 has had the most influential and positive impacts on the ways and opportunities that students with disabilities have access to the same educational opportunities as their peers who are non-disabled (Department of Education, 2017). Griffin-Shirley and Matlock (2004) state that educating students with disabilities in the "least restrictive environment" (p. 127) was mandated under Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) and requires that these students be educated in the general education classroom to the greatest extent

that would be beneficial for them academically and socially. This federal mandate included specific guidelines and descriptions that emphasized the ways that it would positively impact these students and specifically listed the four purposes of this law (U.S. Department of Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2010).

Four Purposes of P.L. 94-142:

- to assure that all children with disabilities have available to them ... a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs

- to assure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents ... are protected

- to assist States and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities

- to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities”

(U.S. Department of Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2010).

According to the U.S. Department of Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (2010), with the inception of EAHCA which later became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children with disabilities were now given educational opportunities that they did not have available to them in the past. This source describes that with these greater educational opportunities came an increased need for qualified special educators to help assist these students attain their educational goals. The Department of Education (1999) states that finding ways to develop and provide “learner centered and individualized programs,” (p. 4) required a dramatic increase in the employment of paraprofessionals.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) Paraprofessional Educational Requirements and Job Roles

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was a federal mandate enacted to ensure that all children received equal opportunities to become successful and held states and schools more accountable for students' progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). NCLB outlines specific paraprofessional educational requirements and identifies specific job descriptions and responsibilities that paraprofessionals may be asked to perform including instructional guidance (Paraeducator.com, 2017). NCLB requires that Title I paraprofessionals who support instruction should be directly supervised by a teacher who is considered highly qualified (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

In the description of NCLB many specifics are outlined including an entire section on teacher qualifications which includes educational requirements and/or prerequisites of the paraprofessional position. The following information is described under the heading of teacher qualifications:

By the end of the 2005-06 school year, all newly hired paraprofessionals compensated with Title I money must have completed at least two years of college, obtained an associate's degree or higher, or possess a high school diploma or equivalent and have passed an evaluation to demonstrate knowledge and teaching ability to assist in teaching reading, writing and mathematics (Education Week, 2011, para. 7).

All existing paraprofessionals were to satisfy the same requirements as new paraprofessionals, but were given four years to do so (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In addition to the paraprofessional's educational requirements and qualifications, NCLB outlines specific duties

and responsibilities that the paraprofessional may be assigned under the direct supervision of a teacher:

- to provide one-on-one tutoring for eligible students, if the tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher
- to assist with classroom management, such as organizing instructional and other materials
- to provide assistance in a computer laboratory
- to conduct parental involvement activities
- to provide support in a library or media center
- to act as a translator (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

The NCLB Act has been beneficial in outlining specifications for the preparation and specific roles assignments of the paraprofessional. This is a fundamental step in assisting schools to set uniform standards for the educational requirements and job prerequisites and implementing specific roles that the paraprofessional should be involved with.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and its Implications for Paraprofessionals

According to Goss (2016), The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law on December 10, 2015 by President Obama and includes many positive benefits for paraprofessionals giving them more training advantages and allowing opportunities for active participation and decision making. This author continues describing each of the Titles included in this law where specific benefits are described for the paraprofessional. She begins by describing that Title I include participation and consultation by the paraprofessional at the federal, state, and local levels. She continues to describe the benefits of Title II giving paraprofessionals alternate routes to become certified teachers which gives them a better

opportunity to advance in their careers if they choose. Goss (2016) lists Titles II and VII as offering many opportunities for paraprofessional training including advancement, leadership opportunities, and training for literacy. She continues by showing that Title III assists paraprofessionals to train in assisting ELL students. The author further explains that Title IV offers professional development in computer technology to improve instruction and student achievement. Title VI specifies training for Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaskan Native American paraprofessionals (Goss, 2016). This new federal law is more specific in identifying paraprofessionals' training opportunities which helps them feel like valued members of the educational team.

Paraprofessional Roles/Job Expectations/Responsibilities

The roles of paraprofessionals have changed dramatically over the past 50 years and include routine clerical tasks, monitoring of students in nonacademic settings such as lunchroom, study hall, and playgrounds, preparing materials, and instructional/behavioral assistance (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Paraprofessionals have become very important individuals within special education programs who are given numerous other responsibilities to fulfill when assisting the special educator including implementing positive behavior supports in discipline programs, providing health procedures, working with students on articulation programs, and conducting tactile communication strategies for students who are deaf/blind (Killoran et al., p. 68). Tews and Lupart (2008) report that there has been much research on trying to establish what roles and responsibilities would be most effective as a paraprofessional, but there is no agreement as to what those specific roles and responsibilities should be. They state that little or no clarity on job expectations has made it difficult to assess what abilities and

role descriptions would be most effective for paraprofessionals when working with students with disabilities (p. 40).

Defining appropriate roles and skills for paraprofessionals (role clarification) is very important to the success of a special education program (Giangreco et al., 2010). In addition to clarifying these roles, many schools have little or no consistency in how these roles are established and implemented. Giangreco et al. (2010) suggest that paraprofessional roles should be restricted to supplemental, teacher designed instruction, and essential noninstructional roles that can help create time and opportunities for teachers to collaborate and spend more time directly instructing students. Paraprofessionals are asked to partake in such a wide variety of job roles and work with a diverse group of students and these differences can sometimes cause them to become confused about their job expectations (Department of Education, 1999). Patterson (2006), Hughes & Valle-Riestra (2008) and Giangreco et al. (2010) discuss how paraprofessional job roles vary within different states, districts, schools, and classroom assignments. These authors also mention how paraprofessionals can assume various roles depending on what age groups of students they are working with and types of disabilities their students are identified as having.

Over the past 20 years, paraprofessionals roles have changed dramatically and include more expectations and decision making concerning the academic instruction of the students they are assigned to work with (Tews & Lupart, 2008). Appl (2006) describes that their roles differ depending on what age group they are working with. She continues by discussing how paraprofessionals working with children in grades K-12 are often expected to assume different roles than those individuals working with younger children. Paraprofessionals who interact with school-aged children usually must provide assistance to individual students or small groups, but

those who work with younger students assume roles as assistant teachers and therapists, home visitors, or child-care providers (Appl, 2006, p. 36).

In one survey given to a group of special education paraprofessionals, they reported spending an average of 47% providing instruction, 19% providing behavioral supports, and 17% engaged in self-directed activities (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). According to another study conducted by Patterson (2006) who interviewed 22 paraprofessionals, a wide range of responsibilities were identified by these individuals including: teaching, modifying activities for students with disabilities included in the general education classroom, behavior management responsibilities, and completing clerical tasks. She emphasizes that even though they were assigned a variety of responsibilities throughout the day, these roles were not clearly defined and varied from day to day within their school setting. Paraprofessionals are often unclear about their roles and responsibilities and are left to figure out the best way to do their jobs in a variety of classroom contexts while working with students with a range of difficulties (Tobin, 2006, p. 2). If administrators and teachers could be more precise and consistent in establishing specific roles and responsibilities, paraprofessionals would feel less overwhelmed and more confident in knowing that they can be successful members of the special education team.

Academic instruction. Paraprofessionals have numerous responsibilities and must assume a variety of roles to effectively work in assisting students with disabilities (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2017; Department of Education, 2017). Although they still perform clerical duties and other nonacademic assignments, there is an increased emphasis on their instructional and learner support roles (Department of Education, 1999). Under the supervision of teachers, these instructional roles include to: (a) assist with maintaining supportive, safe, and healthy learning inclusive environments; (b) observe, document, and report

objective data about learners that helps educators plan, modify, and organize curriculum and learning activities; (c) engage students in teacher developed learning activities; and (d) assist with learner assessment activities (Giangreco et al., 1997; Lyons, 1995; Miramontes, 1990; Mueller, 1997; Passaro et al., 1994; Safarik, 1997; Skelton, 1997; and Stahl & Lorenz, 1995 as cited in Department of Education, 1999).

Behavior supervision and implementation. Most paraprofessionals are responsible for managing the behaviors of students with special needs in the general and special education classrooms (Maggin et al., 2009). According to a survey given by Patterson (2006), 90% of paraprofessional respondents indicated that special educators emphasized the importance of management of student behavior to be more important than academic tasks. One important paraprofessional job requirement was to have the knowledge and training in appropriate behavior management strategies (Patterson, 2006). Wallace et al. (2001) says that although paraprofessionals are not required to create behavior intervention plans, they are responsible for assisting teachers in helping to acquire the required behavior data for students. She states that under the direct supervision of teachers, paraprofessionals must document data on behavior performance and implement behavior management programs established by the teacher.

Collaborator with parents. Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) acknowledge that paraprofessionals have become critical members of a child's educational team because in addition to implementing instructional lessons and being responsible for various other roles and job responsibilities, they also have a direct impact in providing direct supports to families (p. 170). These authors state that many paraprofessionals are directly involved with the community and are well known. Others share the same culture, tradition, and language and can serve as "liaisons" between schools and families (Department of Education, 1999). These

paraprofessionals can help develop strong relationships with the families because some share similar community or cultural backgrounds where they can better relate to the families of the students they are working with (Appl, 2006).

One study conducted by Chopra and French (2004) identifies five different parent/paraprofessional relationships as: close and personal friendship, routine limited interactions, routine extended interactions, minimal relationship, and tense relationship (p. 242, 243). These authors stated that they usually communicated directly or indirectly daily, but the level and nature of their communication varied (p. 243). Paraprofessionals and parents can exchange general information about the child's day at school or routines at home, but specific matters related to the child's progress, behavior, or other challenges should be addressed by the special educator (Chopra & French, 2004). These authors stress that the most important things to consider with parent/paraprofessional communication is that the special educator should guide and set boundaries as to what type of information should be shared with parents.

Self-directed activities. Paraprofessionals work in the general education classroom assisting students with disabilities and providing the appropriate accommodations and modifications throughout the specified time that students are required to spend in this inclusive setting (Tews & Lupart, 2008). In a study conducted by Giangreco and Broer (2005), about 70% of paraprofessionals reported that they had to function at a high level of autonomy with continuous curricular, instructional, and activity participation decisions without the assistance of the regular or special education teacher (p. 17). French (2001), Giangreco and Broer (2005) state that paraprofessionals continue to make instructional decisions and provide the majority of that instruction to some students with little or no professional direction. Most paraprofessionals reported working under the direct supervision of a teacher, but some Title I instructional

paraprofessionals indicated that they worked with students on their own without close supervision from a teacher. (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). *NCLB* requires that Title I paraprofessionals who support instruction should be directly supervised by a teacher who is considered highly qualified (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Although paraprofessionals should work with guidance from the special educator, many are being forced to make important instructional and behavioral decisions on their own (Giangreco et al., 2010) .

Professional Development Opportunities/On the Job Training

IDEA Amendments of 1997 state that paraprofessionals should be appropriately trained and supervised, but did not clearly specify what type or how much training was required (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). This ambiguity has left each state to establish their own specifications on training requirements (National Resource Center for Paraeducators, 2017). Paraprofessionals work with students with a vast range of disabilities and in varied classroom settings and therefore, their individual training needs may differ depending on what specific assignments they are given such as regular versus special education classrooms, specific learning disability (SLD) versus autism spectrum disorder (ASD)]. Although these differences in training standards do exist, Breton (2010) states that with the reauthorization of IDEA 2004 all states are now required to ensure that all personnel needed to provide special education services must be prepared and trained. He explains that states are now required to address identified needs for inservice and preservice training to make sure that paraprofessionals possess the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities (p. 34). Although all states are required to enforce training standards for paraprofessionals, every state has established its own set of standards and guidelines on training.

Breton (2010) states the importance of making sure that paraprofessionals have quality pre-service and continuing in-service training opportunities will help improve the “quality and efficacy” (p. 44) of special education paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals have addressed many areas in which they feel they require professional development opportunities including training in academic and behavior strategies (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). The need for training in reading, math, science, and behavior management strategies were identified by 72% of paraprofessionals as areas that they needed improvements in (Patterson, 2006). Also, 86% of paraprofessionals surveyed stated that they would be willing to participate in any training that would improve their abilities in helping to assist students they are working with (Patterson, 2006). Other paraprofessionals suggested that important areas of training should focus on ways to accommodate learners with special needs, conflict management, managing serious behaviors, and increasing student motivation (Wasburn-Moses et al., 2013). The fact that many paraprofessionals suggested these training needs through different surveys demonstrates their lack of confidence in implementing some of the job tasks that they are assigned to do when working with these students.

Besides professional development opportunities offered by their schools, paraprofessionals commented that the best training came from on-the-job everyday experiences where they were able to learn many types of academic and behavior strategies working directly with the children (Wallace et al., 2001). In a survey conducted by Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) when asked about the most valuable training methods, one paraprofessional said, “On the job, being with good teachers and good people and working with teachers who are willing to teach” (p. 169). With such a large number of paraprofessionals suggesting the need for improved training opportunities and the willingness of these individuals to receive these training

methods, school administrators should consider offering more paraprofessional training opportunities because this can be an important way to help strengthen the effectiveness of their special education program.

Table 1 lists some resources that are available for paraprofessional training as described through the Center for Parent Information and Resources (2014).

Table 1

Resources Available for Paraprofessional Training

Program Name	Brief Description
National Resource Center Paraprofessionals www.nrcpara.org/	Publishes six training manuals for paraprofessionals including the <i>Core Curriculum for Paraprofessionals</i> . The goal of these instructional materials is to provide personnel developers and trainers with resources they can use to improve the performance of their paraeducator workforce.
Project EVOLVE http://www.uvm.edu/cdci/evolve/	Project EVOLVE is an OSEP-funded project that has generated a wealth of resources, including the paraprofessional literature from 1990-2009 and <i>A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports</i> .
Paraeducator Resource and Learning Center (PRLC) http://www.uvm.edu/cdci/evolve/	The PRLC provides information for paraeducators about six important topics: Collaborative Teamwork, Inclusive Education, Families and Cultural Characteristics of Children and Youth with Various Disabilities, Roles and Responsibilities of Paraeducators and Other Team Members, and Implementing Teacher-planned Instruction.

Program Name	Brief Description
<p>CEC's standards for paraprofessionals http://www.cec.sped.org/ScriptContent/Orders/ProductDetail.cfm?section=CEC_Store&pc=P5691</p>	<p>CEC is the Council for Exceptional Children. Its <i>Parability: The CEC Paraeducator Standards Workbook</i> includes CEC Standards for Paraeducators, and two tools that can be used by district personnel, principals, trainers, and paraeducators to ensure that paraeducators meet the CEC Standards.</p>
<p>ParaEducator Learning Network http://www.paraeducator.net/</p>	<p>This network helps school systems address paraeducator training needs via an e-learning program currently offering over 115 courses in a wide range of areas. A service center, district, or school starts the process by subscribing to the network services, purchasing individual "seats" for trainees (\$75/seat). This gives the trainees access to the online training modules.</p>
<p>Project PARA http://para.unl.edu/index.lasso</p>	<p>Project PARA conducts research and develops training materials for paraeducators and teachers who supervise them. The project provides web-based self-study programs that offer school districts resources to provide introductory training for paraeducators and/or the teachers who supervise them. These resources are offered free of charge to schools and teacher training programs. Participating schools provide an instructor or mentor who manages their own self study participants.</p>

Special educator supervision of paraprofessionals. Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, and French (2011) emphasize that most special education teachers begin their first day in the classroom with little or no formal training on how to supervise those paraprofessionals that they are expected to work with). They say that even though paraprofessionals are expected to work under the direct supervision of the teacher, most assume their roles with little or no assistance because most teachers do not possess the required skills to supervise the paraprofessional effectively. Teacher preparation programs need to prepare future teachers by offering instruction in teaming and collaborating, and offering leadership skills if they are to work effectively with paraeducators (Chopra et al., 2011). Most teacher education programs have not developed curriculum content to prepare teachers to plan for working with paraeducators, delegate or assign tasks, assess paraeducator skills and performance, and provide on-the-job training (Department of Education, 1999). Many special education university programs do not include coursework or training opportunities in supervision methods although studies have shown that these teacher skills are required to sustain a successful working relationship (Wallace et al., 2001).

According to a survey conducted by 300 special education teachers and paraprofessionals with various degrees of experience, the majority stated that they expected to supervise and collaborate with their paraprofessionals, but had received little preservice or in-service preparation to do this (Appl, 2006). Special education teachers must possess the skills necessary to assist paraprofessionals to perform the required tasks and assume the responsibilities that are required to be effective members of the special education team (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). Based on the results of two studies conducted by Chopra et al (2011), there has been clear evidence found that when special educators can supervise effectively, the performance of paraprofessionals improves. These authors show how this positive correlation demonstrates the

importance that special educators' supervisory skills can be when assisting paraprofessionals become successful in their job roles.

Wallace et al. (2001) emphasizes that another way to help improve teacher training on supervising paraprofessionals is to find out what specific training needs are important to the paraprofessional. They state that based on the input they receive from paraprofessionals, they can then make better decisions on what types of supervisory training they should offer their teachers. It is essential for school districts to value the opinions of their paraprofessionals and encourage their feedback on specific training needs they feel would be the most beneficial when helping students (Wallace et al., 2001). Teachers who led effectively have been shown to (a) value paraeducators as important members of their team, (b) establish clear boundaries for the paraeducator role, (c) take responsibility for and time to plan the delivery of services with the team, (d) provide on the job coaching to paraeducators, and (e) encourage paraeducators' professional development to help them carry out their responsibilities effectively and promote career advancement (Chopra et al., 2011, p. 22).

If paraprofessionals know what their job responsibilities are going to be, they can be more effective in assisting the child or children they are assigned to work with. Identifying specific job duties and offering guidance and feedback can help the paraprofessional focus on what important aspects are required to do the job well. French and Chopra (2006) explain that as the supervisor, a special educator does not let paraprofessionals work alone. They explain that the special educator must provide written plans, observe task performance, and offer constructive feedback to the paraprofessional. According to Maggin et al. (2009), four important strategies that will help assist teachers with supervising paraprofessionals include: defining roles, training for tasks, evaluating performance, and encouraging collaboration through regularly scheduled

meetings. These authors explain that these strategies help promote understanding and teamwork between the teacher and paraprofessional. These authors state that if paraprofessionals have a clear understanding of their expectations, can learn helpful methods to assist with the implementation of the teacher's instructional plan, and provide help with student assessments, they will become very important assets to the special education team.

Importance of collaboration between special educator and paraprofessional.

Paraprofessionals and special educators work together as a team to assist all students with disabilities successfully meet their goals and objectives (Tobin, 2006). Based on the results from a study conducted by Patterson (2006), paraprofessionals expressed the need for collaborative and cooperative working relationships with all members (teachers, parents, and paraprofessionals) involved in the education and care of students with disabilities. This author states that teamwork and communication are two components that help to establish an effective classroom relationship. French and Chopra (2006) describe the importance of effective collaboration methods to help build the positive trust that makes an effective team where the teacher can effectively supervise paraprofessionals and guide them to understand their specific roles. These authors describe how clear communication between the special educator and paraprofessional can offer many benefits including: helping paraprofessionals understand what is expected of them, helping guide them with implementation of the classroom curriculum, and giving them an opportunity to offer each other feedback. Wallace et al. (2001) believe communication between teachers and paraprofessionals should be encouraged because it can benefit the teachers, paraprofessionals, and students who work together. They explain that through this communication process, roles and expectations, responsibilities, skills, interests, and areas for development can be discussed and clarified (p. 531).

From the results of a research study conducted by Biggs et al. (2016), the attitudes and efforts of the teacher, paraprofessional, and administrators were very important in determining the teacher-paraprofessional relationship. These authors acknowledge how important the support from all of these groups can be when trying to establish a positive, collaborate relationship between the educator and paraprofessional. They describe some specific ways that teachers can improve their daily interactions with their paraprofessional(s) by (a) approaching these relationships by sharing and collaborating, (b) demonstrating proficiency and professionalism in their interactions, (c) leading by communicating clearly and explicitly and making sure to emphasize the paraprofessional's strengths, and (d) making efforts to show paraprofessionals that they are valued and appreciated (p. 270).

Collaboration is an important element in helping assist paraprofessionals in many areas of their job responsibilities especially when they can understand their roles and how to effectively implement all their job responsibilities. Teachers need to offer their paraprofessionals training on how to teach content, but they must also help them understand why they use the specific strategies or approaches if they want to form positive working relationships (Appl, 2006). Understanding how the special educator and paraprofessional can build and strengthen positive working relationships with one another is an important indicator in ensuring that students receive a high-quality education (Biggs et al., 2016).

Paraprofessionals, Inclusion, and Negative Impacts on Students

With the creation of IDEA and the NCLB federal mandates, the increased need for paraprofessionals in the inclusive setting is becoming more prominent in special education (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) . Under IDEA, students with disabilities are required to receive their education in the least restrictive environment which for most of these students means that

they will be included in the general education setting (U.S. Department of Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2010). In the inclusion setting, Patterson (2006) states that paraprofessionals perceived that they were primarily responsible for the successful inclusion of these students in the general education classroom (Patterson, 2006). This author continues by stating that they felt that they were responsible for: keeping students with disabilities from being disruptive and bothersome, being responsible for providing on the spot curriculum modifications, and being expected to be the expert for the student (p. 4).

According to a study conducted by Tews and Lupart (2008), most students who participated in the survey felt that paraprofessionals helped promote positive peer relationships between the included students and their peers. Through this survey, these authors showed that some students with disabilities receiving their education in an inclusive environment may require the assistance of the paraprofessional to help with socialization skills, but sometimes these students become overdependent on their assistance and this could limit their social interaction with peers. Although this survey shows some positive impacts on students who are relying on one-on-one assistance in the regular education classroom, many results from the study have shown negative effects in many areas including less student socialization, decreased autonomy, and reduced responsibilities of teachers to instruct these students (Tews & Lupart, 2008, p. 44).

Negative impacts such as unnecessary dependence on the paraprofessional and interference with peer interactions have been a few of the concerns raised when paraprofessionals are working with only one student in the general education setting (Giangreco, et al., 2006). Students lost their feeling of self-sufficiency where they believed they could not accomplish tasks without the assistance of their paraprofessional, many students have felt limited

socialization opportunities with their peers, and other felt isolation from the class when they are working with their paraprofessional for most or all of the day (Tews & Lupart, 2008).

In addition to negatively impacting the socialization skills and self-determination of these students, the consistent one-on-one assistance of the paraprofessional has had negative impacts on the quantity and quality of teacher assistance that they receive (Giangreco et al., 2010). Tews & Lupart (2008) reported that paraprofessionals are being held accountable for being the primary person responsible for teaching the student with disabilities. Giangreco and Broer (2005) describe how teachers are spending less time instructing students who require the most academic assistance because paraprofessionals are teaching them more academics with one-on-one assistance. They state that nearly 40% of paraprofessionals reported that they were providing most of the instruction to students with disabilities instead of the teachers and special educators providing that instruction, and because of this, there are concerns that the least qualified personnel are often assigned to instruct and support those students with the greatest academic challenges.

Giangreco and Broer (2005) emphasize that although there are many benefits to providing assistance to children with disabilities through the services that a paraprofessional can provide, there remains much evidence showing that overreliance on paraprofessionals can have a detrimental impact on these students. They claim that when students are overdependent on their paraprofessional, they may struggle more with social interactions, self-determination can decrease, and limited instructional time is taking place with the teachers. Paraprofessionals often receive inadequate role clarification, training opportunities, and supervision especially when providing one-to-one support in an inclusive classroom environment and this has shown to have these many negative impacts (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

Chapter Summary

Paraprofessionals have become an ever-increasing population in special education and the need to identify important roles, provide training opportunities, and consistent qualification and educational standards are important issues to identify and evaluate. Recently, education policies have focused the needs for raising standards for paraprofessional qualifications, supervision, and professional development (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

If we want to guarantee that we hire and retain the best qualified individuals, we must identify and evaluate the most important paraprofessional roles, offer training opportunities that begin with professional development prospects and extend into on-the-job training. Ghere and York-Barr (2007) emphasize the need for creating a culture of respect and collaboration, striving for manageable assignments and schedules, and fostering “job-embedded” learning can help decrease paraprofessional job turnover (p. 30). These authors affirm that allowing paraprofessionals opportunities to provide feedback on classroom issues and contribute ideas through the use of effective collaboration can contribute to positive relationships between all team members. Also important is the need to assess and improve special educator skills when supervising paraprofessionals so that they can receive effective training from the special educator they work with (Tobin, 2006). Wallace et al. (2001) stress how important it is for teachers and administrators to understand paraprofessionals’ perceived need for training, role clarification, and involvement in decision making (p. 529).

Finally, identifying some negative impacts on the paraprofessionals’ presence in the inclusive classroom can help administrators, special educators, and paraprofessionals find alternative, positive methods that will contribute to improvements in the inclusive classroom (Tews & Lupart, 2008). With the ever-increasing shortages of special educators and increased

reliance on paraprofessionals, administrators must find ways to make improvements to their special education programs and maintain a competent group of paraprofessionals that will help strengthen those programs (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

Chapter III

Methodology

This practical action research study was implemented using a descriptive, quantitative approach with a survey instrument. Prospective participants including special education teachers and paraprofessionals were asked if they would like to participate in a survey by filling out a questionnaire about specific paraprofessional roles and training frequencies. This chapter will briefly discuss the specific participants, instrumentation, procedures, data collection, and data analysis methods. Paraprofessionals working in special education inclusive and self-contained classrooms in grades K-12 will be the focus group of this study.

Participants

The participants in this study were special education teachers and paraprofessionals working in special education programs who voluntarily chose to partake in this research study. These participants worked with students in grades K-12 inclusive and self-contained classrooms from Chicago Public Schools and various southwest suburban school districts in Illinois. The teachers and paraprofessionals from 2 Chicago Public PK-8 Schools (school A had an enrollment of 472 students and school B had 650 students) were sent online surveys via email through Google forms and were also given paper surveys. Survey participants from 4 southwest suburban K-8 elementary schools with an average enrollment of 500 students were sent online surveys through Google forms via email. Also, included in the online survey, were respondents from 2 southwest suburban high schools where school A had an enrollment of 2500 students and school B an enrollment of 500 students.

In addition, some of the participants were Governors State University (GSU) classmates working as special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Other participants were obtained

through a snowball sampling approach with initial contacts made through GSU classmates. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012), snowball sampling is described as choosing a few participants to participate in your study and then using those participants to help you identify additional participants so that you can accumulate a sufficient number of participants (p. 143). Some GSU classmate contacts helped provide the additional participants to complete the survey process through this snowball sampling procedure by distributing paper copies of the surveys and forwarding online surveys to their coworkers.

Instrumentation

The special education teachers and paraprofessional participants were given a questionnaire based on their respective jobs. Surveys were distributed to these participants online with a direct link attached via emails and text messages. A special education teacher survey and paraprofessional survey was sent out depending on the job description of each participant. Each of the questionnaires was comprised of basic demographic questions such as age and gender. Also included were questions pertaining to professional and educational experiences such as levels of education and years of experience in their jobs. Finally, questions pertaining to paraprofessional roles and training were included. A peer-review committee consisting of the professor and four peer research students confirmed validity of each of the surveys by reviewing the questions and providing constructive feedback pertaining to the important data that would be necessary to conduct the research project.

The special education teacher survey consisted of 10 questions. Questions 1 and 2 were basic demographic questions including gender and age. Questions 3-6 were questions asking about education level, teaching licensure, endorsements, and years of experience. Questions 7 and 8 were questions about paraprofessional roles based on the most competent paraprofessional

that they had worked with and the frequencies of those roles that the most competent paraprofessional spent in each of those roles. Question 9 was a question pertaining to how many hours of on-the-job training the special education teacher provided to the paraprofessional. The final question asked the special educator to identify how paraprofessionals felt about their job, how their job impacted students' learning, and how prepared and knowledgeable they were.

The paraprofessional survey consisted of 8 questions. Questions 1 and 2 included basic demographic questions including gender and age. Questions 3 and 4 included questions about education level and years of experience. Questions 5 included questions about the frequency of specific roles that the paraprofessional participated in. Questions 6 and 7 included defining the number of clock hours offered for formal and on-the-job training in each specific role. Question 8 asked the paraprofessionals questions pertaining to specific aspects of the job including how they felt about their job, what impact they have had on their students' learning, and their preparation and ability levels.

Survey participants rated the importance of paraprofessional job roles by the time spent on each of those roles using a Likert scale with a point value for each response on this scale (never = 0 points, 1-2 times a week = 1 point, 3-4 times a week = 2 points, and daily = 3 points). This data was analyzed using a quantitative, descriptive approach.

The questionnaire also included questions pertaining to training opportunities of the paraprofessional as seen from the special educator's and paraprofessional's point of view. The responses from these questions served as the data that was analyzed and was collected using the Likert scale system. No formal training (0 hours) = 0 points, little formal training (1-2 hours) = 1 point, some formal training (3-6 hours) = 2 points, adequate formal training (7-9 hours) = 3 points, and significant formal training (10+ hours) = 4 points.

The final question responses rated the overall importance of the paraprofessionals' job and included the general attitudes about the paraprofessionals' job, the impact they had on student learning, and their preparation and competence levels. These responses were based on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (strongly disagree = 0 points, somewhat disagree = 1 point, somewhat agree = 2 points, and strongly agree = 3 points).

Procedure

A special education teacher survey and paraprofessional survey was created based on information obtained through the literature review that was completed on the importance of various paraprofessional roles and training opportunities. Ethical training and permissions were obtained through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the study was in compliance with all ethical standards. Along with each of these surveys, an informational letter was sent to the special educator or paraprofessional giving a brief description of the topic, importance of the action research study, and a consent for approval to participate in this research project. The contents of the informational letters stated that once the participant returned the completed questionnaire, they gave consent to participate in the study. The letters also stated that the survey participants' personal information would remain confidential and data collected would not be personally identified with the survey participants. These informational letters were either attached to a paper copy of the surveys to hand out to participants or attached to each participant's email with links to the surveys.

Data Collection

The prospective participants were initially contacted in person or through email with two reminders to complete the survey within the given time frame. They were given a timeline of two to three weeks to review and submit their survey responses. Once the survey data was

analyzed and used for purposes of this study, the surveys were destroyed within three months of the study's completion. All responses would be used for group analysis pertaining to this research study only.

Data Analysis

This study used descriptive, quantitative statistics to analyze the collected data from the survey method (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Frequencies, averages, and percentages were tabulated to help analyze and describe the results of the data. This data was collected and transferred into Microsoft Excel for further analysis. Basic descriptive statistics were presented and analyzed by using narrative, tabular, and graphic formats. Through analysis of the data, the most common and effective paraprofessional roles and training programs were identified based on the special educators' and paraprofessionals' perceptions through their survey responses. The findings from the surveys and data analysis were discussed in Chapter IV.

Chapter Summary

This action research project was conducted to obtain data results of perceptions among special educators and paraprofessional when focusing on paraprofessional roles and formal and on-the-job training opportunities. These results can provide information to help schools identify the most common and important paraprofessional roles and training requirements needed to maintain an effective special education program. Identifying the frequency of participation in each role and amount of training provided can help states and school districts create and maintain clear and consistent guidelines when describing paraprofessional roles and offering training programs within each school. Also, this data can help school districts observe the correlation between various paraprofessional roles and training opportunities to see how this may affect the retention of positive, confident paraprofessionals who can perform their jobs effectively.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of the special education teacher and paraprofessional on the most important paraprofessional roles and training requirements. By obtaining results from these two groups, the most important paraprofessional roles were obtained based on the frequency that paraprofessionals took part in each of those roles.

In addition to identifying the most important paraprofessional roles, the quantity and types of training offered to prepare paraprofessionals to effectively participate in each role was identified. Also, special education teachers identified performance in each job role when rating the most competent paraprofessional that they have had experience working with. Rating the performance in each job role helps identify how prepared they are when participating in their jobs. It is important to understand preparation levels so that schools can determine whether their paraprofessionals are being offered the appropriate levels of training opportunities to successfully partake in their jobs.

Data analysis and survey results were based on the 31 surveys returned from both groups specified at the various elementary and high schools surveyed. Special education teachers returned 9 online surveys and 4 paper surveys yielding a total of 13 special education teacher surveys. The special education survey consisted of five main sections: (a) demographics, (b) paraprofessionals' roles based on competence, (c) paraprofessionals' frequency of participation in each role, (d) on-the-job training provided by the special educator, and (e) the overall level of agreement based on specific aspects of the paraprofessionals' job.

Paraprofessionals returned 11 online surveys and 7 paper surveys yielding a total of 18 surveys. The paraprofessional survey consisted of four main sections: (a) demographics, (b)

frequency of participation in each paraprofessional role, (c) amounts of formal training provided, (d) amount of on-the-job training provided, and (e) the overall level of agreement based on specific aspects of the paraprofessionals' job.

Demographics for Special Education Teacher and Paraprofessional Survey Respondents

Table 2

Demographics for Special Education Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Item	Special Education Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	3	23	1	6
Female	10	77	17	94
Age				
20-30 years old	5	50	2	11
31-40	2	20	9	50
41-50	3	30	0	0
51-60	0	0	4	22
61-70	0	0	3	17
Education Level				
High School	0	0	4	22
Non-Degree College	0	0	5	28
Associate Degree	0	0	5	28
Bachelor's Degree	8	62	4	22
Master's Degree	5	38	0	0
Experience				
1-5 years	7	54	7	39
6-10 years	4	31	4	22
11-15 years	1	8	4	22
16-20 years	1	8	3	17

Note: percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth and are not exact amounts.

N = number of participant/respondents

Table 2 shows the demographics for the special education teachers and paraprofessionals who completed surveys. The demographic section of the special education survey (questions 1-6) consisted of questions pertaining to gender, age, levels of education, teaching licensure held,

endorsements, and years of experience. Of the 13- special education teacher survey responses, frequencies, percentages were tabulated for each area of demographics.

The demographic section of the paraprofessional survey (questions 1-4) consisted of questions pertaining to gender, age, levels of education, and years of experience. Of the 18 – paraprofessional survey responses, frequencies and percentages were tabulated for each area of demographics. Table 2 gives a detailed description of the demographic information to compare as obtained in each section of the special education teacher and paraprofessional surveys.

Special Education Teachers’ Licensure and Endorsements

Table 3

Special Education Teacher’s Licensure and Endorsements

Item	n	%
Teaching License		
Early Childhood	1	8
Elementary Education	4	31
Secondary Education	7	54
Alternative Certification	1	8
Endorsements		
LBS 1	8	62
LBS 1, Reading, and L.A.	1	8
LBS 1, Reading, and Math	1	8
LBS 1 and Social Science	3	23

Note: percentages have been rounded to the nearest hundredth and are not exact amounts.
 N= number of participants/responses

Table 3 shows the licensure and endorsement data that was retrieved from questions 4 and 5 on the special education teacher survey. The results in table 3 show frequencies and percentages of special education teacher licensures and teaching endorsements based on the 13- special education teacher survey respondents. As seen in the table, the most popular teaching license was the secondary education teaching license. Also, with endorsements, all teachers had

their LBS 1 endorsement and the greatest percentage of respondents had a combination of the LBS 1 and social science endorsements.

Levels of Competence in Paraprofessional Roles as Identified by the Special Educator

Figure 1 shows the levels of competence in each of the paraprofessional roles based on the most competent paraprofessional the special education teacher has worked with. These levels of competencies are shown in the bar graph. By observing this graph, you can see the most popular paraprofessional job roles based on how the special educator rated his/her most competent paraprofessional. The highest percentage of special educators rate their most competent paraprofessional as extremely competent in assisting with work support duties. The next two highest percentages where the paraprofessional was rated as extremely competent are helping with positive behavior supports and social skills followed by working with students on remedial instruction and/or reinforcing skills.

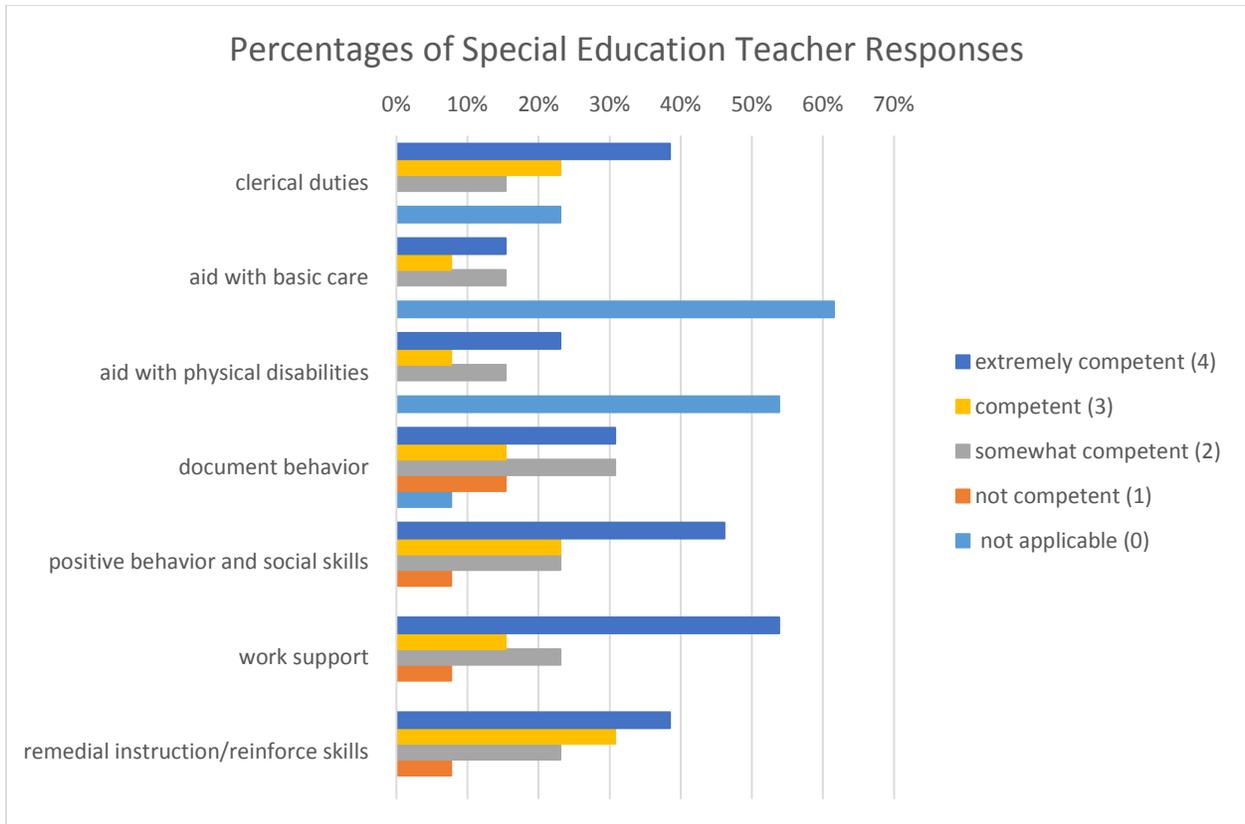


Figure 1. Percentages of special education teacher responses rating the most competent paraprofessional they have worked within each job category/role. The percentages are derived based on the total number of special education teacher survey participants (13) and how they rated their most competent paraprofessional using the Likert scale. The scale ranges from not applicable = 0 to extremely competent = 4. Every paraprofessional job category/role is listed on the left and percentages for each competence level are shown in the chart.

Frequency of Time the Most Competent Paraprofessional Spends in Each Job Role as Identified by the Special Educator

Table 4 distinguishes the frequency that the most competent paraprofessional, as identified by the special education teacher, spends in each job role. The greatest frequency of special educators identified the paraprofessional taking part in the behavior job role daily. The next two greatest frequencies were identified as paraprofessionals participating in recess and lunch duties followed by collaborating with teacher daily.

Table 4

Frequency in Job Roles as Identified by Special Education Teacher

Item	Never (0)	1-2 times (1)	3-4 times (2)	daily (3)	average
Behavior	1	2	0	10	2.46
Recess & Lunch	4	1	0	8	1.92
Direct Instruction	2	6	2	3	1.46
Daily Planning	4	4	3	2	1.23
Reinforce Concepts	1	2	6	4	2.00
Evaluate Activities	2	3	3	5	1.85
Observe & Record Progress	1	6	4	2	1.54
Create instructional materials	6	2	5	0	.92
Administer Formal Assessments	0	7	5	1	1.54
Help with Assistive Technology	5	3	2	3	1.23
Assist with Physical Disabilities	7	2	2	2	.92
Help with Basic Care Needs	9	1	2	1	.62
Clerical Tasks	2	2	6	3	1.77
Communicate with Parents	4	5	4	0	1.00
Collaborate with Teacher	1	1	3	8	2.38
Communicate with Related Service Personnel	3	2	4	4	1.69

Note: Total number of special education teacher respondents totaled 13. Averages have been rounded to the nearest hundredth. Averages are based on a Likert scale of job frequencies: (a) never = 0, (b) 1-2 times a week = 1, (c) 3-4 times a week = 2, and (d) daily = 3.

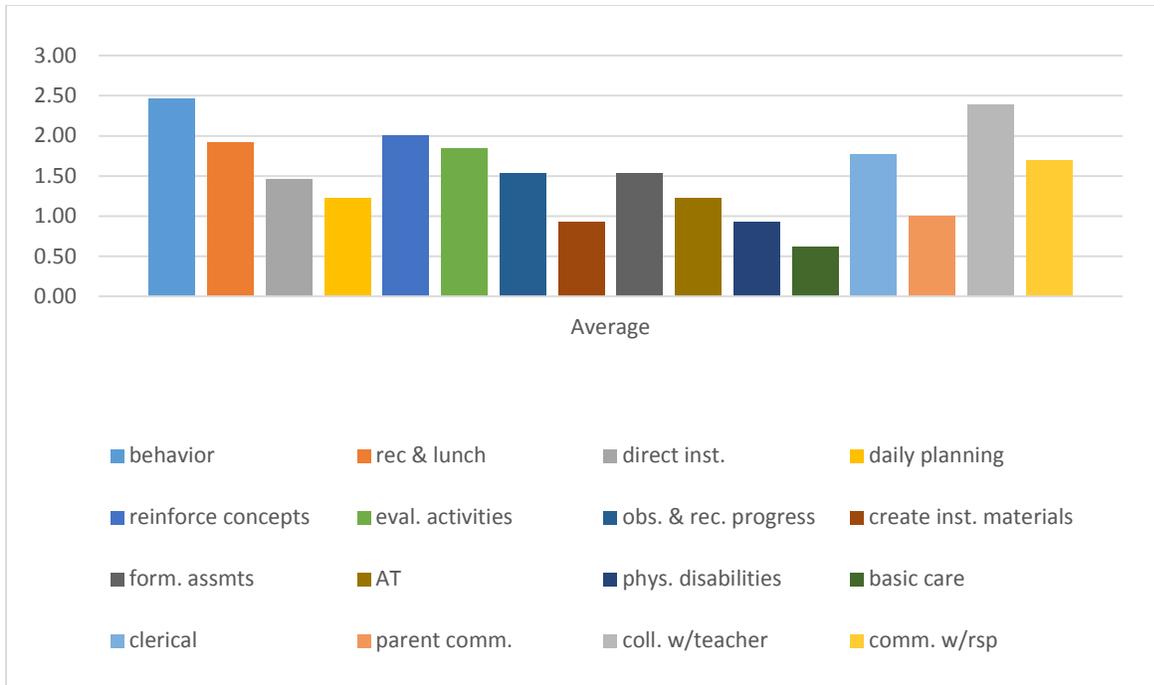


Figure 2. Averages of frequencies in job roles as identified by the special education teacher are shown in the figure above. These averages are based on a Likert scale of job frequencies: (a) never = 0, (b) 1-2 times a week = 1, (c) 3-4 times a week = 2, and (d) daily = 3.

On-the-Job Training Clock Hours Provided to the Paraprofessional by the Special Education Teacher

Table 5 shows the number of on-the-job training that special education teachers provide to their paraprofessional. Special education teachers were asked to mark the number of clock hours they provide on-the-job training to their paraprofessionals in each respective job role based on a Likert scale. Table 5 shows the number of respondents who provide no on-the-job training (0 hours) = 0, little on-the-job training (1-2 hours) = 1, some on-the-job training (3-6) = 2, adequate on-the-job training (7-9 hours) = 3, and significant on-the-job training (10+ hours) = 4. This table distinguishes what the most popular training areas are based on the frequencies of on-the-job training provided by the special educator. Most special educators seem to provide little (1-2 hours) to some (3-6 hours) on-the-job training in academic and behavior job roles.

Table 5

Frequencies in Amount of On-the-Job Training Provided to Paraprofessionals by the Special Educator

Item	none (0 hrs.) (0)	little (1-2 hrs.) (1)	some (3-6 hrs.) (2)	adequate (7-9 hrs.) (3)	significant (10+) (4)
Remedial instruction	2	3	5	1	1
Work support	2	2	5	2	1
Positive behavior supports	1	5	3	2	1
Document behavior	2	4	3	2	1
Physical disabilities	6	3	2	0	1
Basic care	8	1	3	0	0
Clerical Duties	4	2	3	2	1

Note: Although there were 13 total special education teacher respondents, one respondent did not complete this section. Frequencies based on the 12 special education teachers who responded to the amount of on-the-job training they provided to their paraprofessionals.

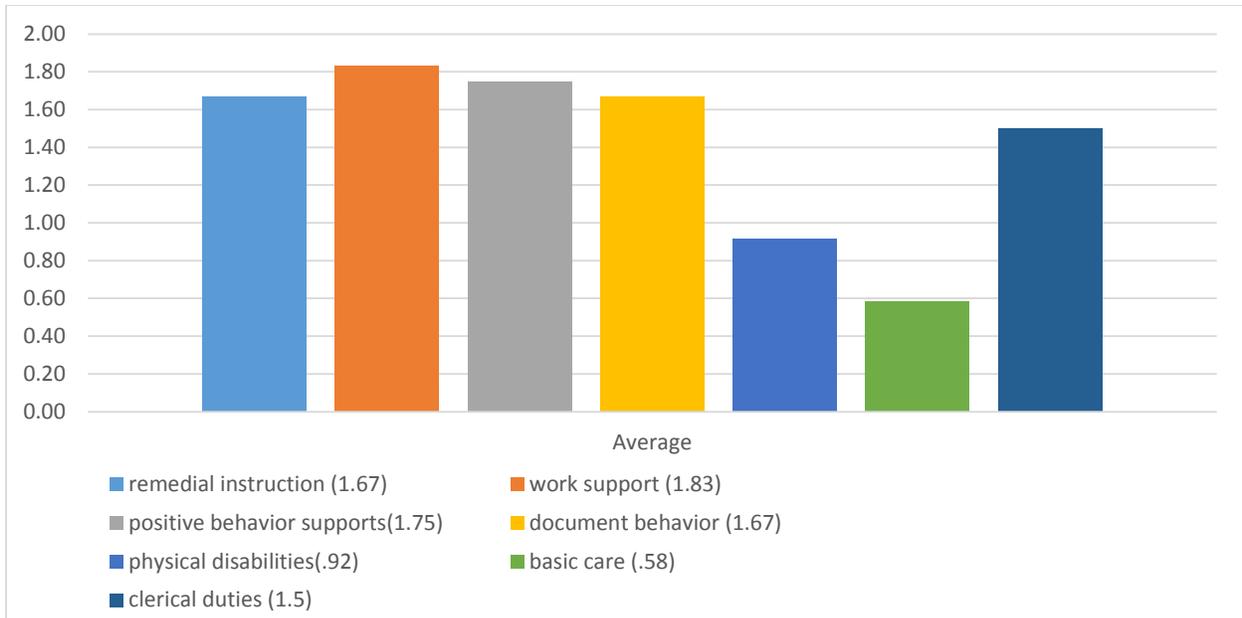


Figure 3. Averages are derived from 12 special educator survey responses pertaining to the number of on-the-job training they provided to their paraprofessionals. Averages of on-the-job training in each of the job roles are shown in the bar chart. These averages are based on a Likert scale of (a) no on-the-job training (0 hours) = 0, (b) little on-the-job training (1-2 hours) = 1, (c) some on-the-job training (3-6 hours) = 2, (d) adequate on-the-job training (7-9 hours) = 3, and (e) significant on-the-job training (10+ hours) = 4.

Special Education Teacher’s Levels of Agreement Based on Specific Elements of the Paraprofessional’s Job

Figure 4 shows percentages based on special education teachers’ responses to various aspects of paraprofessionals’ job roles and the impact that they have on students and their families. The following bar graph shows the percentage of special education teachers as they responded to each area of the paraprofessional’s role. The levels of agreement for each category can be seen in this bar graph. The greatest percentages of special educators strongly agreed that their paraprofessionals felt respected, contributed to learning, their opinions were valued, and they were aware of child needs.

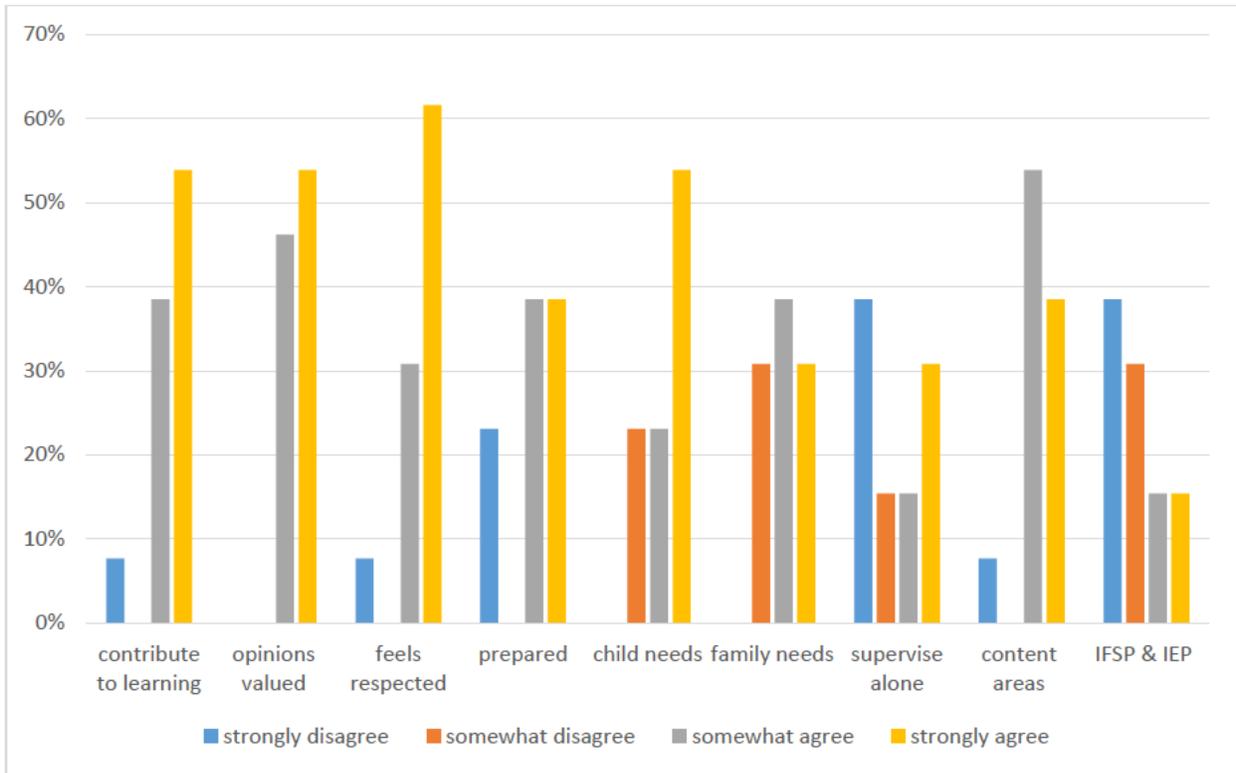


Figure 4. The percentages are obtained from the 13 special education teacher respondents. They have rated their level of agreement pertaining to each paraprofessional job role based on a Likert scale where (a) strongly disagree = 0, (b) somewhat disagree = 1, (c) somewhat agree = 2, and (d) strongly agree = 3. Each of the statements pertaining to the paraprofessional's role is listed at the bottom of the graph.

Table 6

Special Education Teacher's Levels of Agreement in Paraprofessional Job Roles

Item	Average
Contributes to learning	2.38
Opinions are valued	2.54
Feel respected	2.46
Prepared	1.92
Aware of children's needs	2.31
Aware of family needs	2.00
Supervise children alone	1.38
Knowledgeable in content areas	2.23
Participate in IFSP and IEP meetings	1.08

Note: Average was calculated based on the Likert scale where levels of agreement were as follows: (a) strongly disagree = 0, (b) somewhat disagree = 1, (c) somewhat agree = 2, and (d) strongly agree = 3.

Paraprofessionals Identify Frequency of Participation in Job Roles

Table 7 identifies the frequencies that paraprofessionals participated in each job role. Each of the job roles can be seen in the table along with the number of paraprofessional survey respondents as they identified the amount of time they were responsible in partaking in each job role. Some of the largest frequencies of paraprofessionals identified that they participated in many behavior and academic job roles, helping with assistive technology, and collaborating with the special education teacher as job responsibilities that they were responsible for daily.

Table 7

Frequency in Job Roles as Identified by Paraprofessional

Item	Never (0)	1-2 times (1)	3-4 times (2)	daily (3)	average
Behavior	0	1	1	16	2.83
Recess & Lunch	2	2	1	13	2.39
Direct Instruction	2	4	3	9	2.06
Daily Planning	8	4	3	2	.94
Reinforce Concepts	0	2	4	11	2.53
Evaluate Activities	4	3	8	3	1.56
Observe & Record Progress	4	4	4	6	1.67
Create instructional materials	11	5	1	1	.56
Administer Formal Assessments	7	10	1	0	.67
Help with Assistive Technology	4	3	1	10	1.94
Assist with Physical Disabilities	13	2	0	3	.61
Help with Basic Care Needs	12	2	0	4	.78
Clerical Tasks	11	2	2	3	.83
Communicate with Parents	4	9	0	5	1.33
Collaborate with Teacher	4	5	1	8	1.72
Communicate with Related Service Personnel	6	3	2	3	1.14

Note: Number of paraprofessional survey respondents was 18. Averages are based on a Likert scale of job frequencies: (a) never = 0, (b) 1-2 times a week = 1, (c) 3-4 times a week = 2, and (d) daily = 3. Averages have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

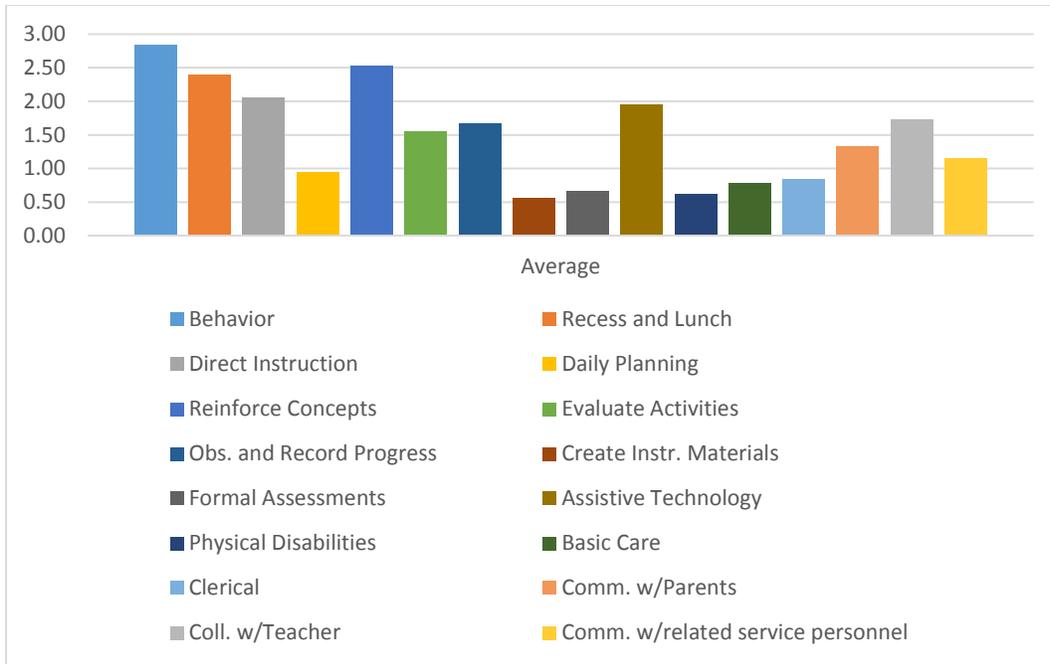


Figure 5. Average of frequencies in job roles as identified by the paraprofessional are shown in the figure above. These averages are based on the Likert scale of: (a) never = 0, (b) 1-2 times a week = 1, (c) 3-4 times a week = 2, and (d) daily = 3.

Paraprofessional Views on Formal Training Versus On-the-Job Training

Table 6 identifies paraprofessional survey respondents' levels of formal and on-the-job training in various job roles. The scale for each type of training is as follows: (a) no on-the-job training (0 hours) = 0, (b) little on-the-job training (1-2 hours) = 1, (c) some on-the-job training (3-6 hours) = 2, (d) adequate on-the-job training (7-9 hours) = 3, and (f) significant on-the-job training (10+ hours) = 4. When looking at each specific job role in table, the frequencies of each type of training based on number of clock hours is shown. The number of clock hours of formal and on-the-job training hours provided to paraprofessionals can be seen in the table. Based on the frequency of paraprofessional respondents, the most training provided was in behavior modification strategies where they received significant (10+ hours) of formal training.

Table 8

Formal and On-the-Job Training Hours Identified by Paraprofessionals

Item	none (0 hrs.) (0)	little (1-2 hrs.) (1)	some (3-6 hrs.) (2)	adequate (7-9 hrs.) (3)	significant (10+ hrs.) (4)	average F/OTJ
Remedial instruction reinforce skills	5/2	5/6	4/5	1/1	3/3	1.56/1.82
Work support	5/4	6/5	1/3	2/2	4/3	1.67/1.71
Behavior modification strategies	4/1	5/6	2/6	1/0	6/4	2.00/2.00
Document behavior	6/4	5/6	2/3	0/1	5/4	1.61/1.72
Help with physical disabilities	9/11	6/4	0/0	1/0	2/2	0.94/0.71
Assist with basic care needs	13/12	4/3	0/1	1/0	0/0	0.39/0.47
Carry out clerical tasks	8/ 6	3/5	0/2	3/1	4/3	1.56/1.41

Note: Data in table lists the number of paraprofessional respondents. Averages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and are based on number of respondents. Number of paraprofessional respondents for formal training data are 18. Number of paraprofessional respondents for on-the-job training data are 17 in all areas except for documenting behavior. The number of paraprofessional respondents in the documenting behavior area totaled 18. The first number is formal training data (F), second number is on-the-job training data (OTJ).



Figure 6. Averages are determined based on the number of paraprofessional survey respondents. The number of formal and on-the-job training hours are determined on a Likert scale as follows: (a) no on-the-job training (0 hours) = 0, (b) little on-the-job training (1-2 hours) = 1, (c) some on-the-job training (3-6 hours) = 2, (d) adequate on-the-job training (7-9 hours) = 3, and (f) significant on-the-job training (10+ hours) = 4.

The Paraprofessional's Levels of Agreement Based on Specific Elements of Their Job

Figure 7 shows the percentages of paraprofessional respondents based on their levels of agreement in various aspects of their job roles and the impact that they have on students and their families. The bar graph shows that paraprofessionals strongly agree that they contribute to learning, are aware of the child's needs, and are knowledgeable in the content areas of reading, writing, and math.

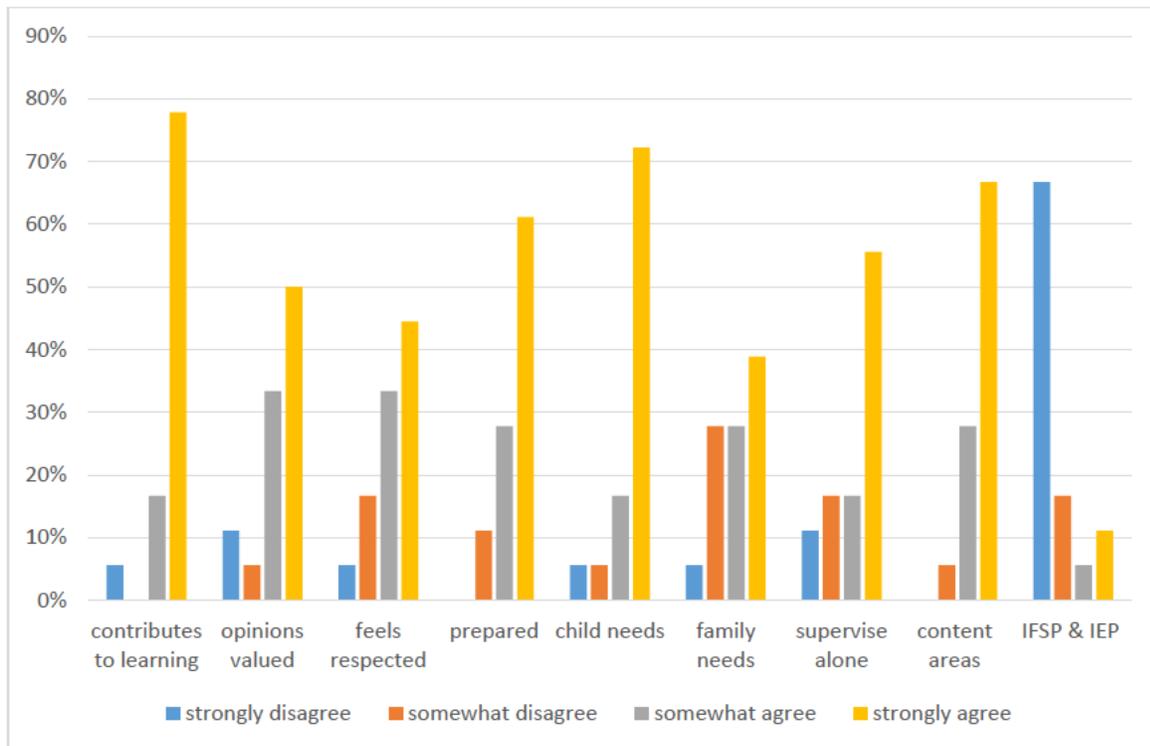


Figure 7. The percentages are obtained from the 18 paraprofessional survey respondents. They have rated their level of agreement pertaining to each of their job roles based on a Likert scale where (a) strongly disagree = 0, (b) somewhat disagree = 1, (c) somewhat agree = 2, and (d) strongly agree = 3. Each of the statements pertaining to the paraprofessional's role is listed at the bottom of the graph.

Table 9

Paraprofessional's Levels of Agreement in their Job Roles

Item	Average
Contributes to learning	2.67
Opinions are valued	2.22
Feel respected	2.17
Prepared	2.50
Aware of children's needs	2.56
Aware of family needs	2.00
Supervise children alone	2.17
Knowledgeable in content areas	2.61
Participate in IFSP and IEP meetings	.61

Note: Average was calculated based on the Likert scale where levels of agreement were as follows: (a) strongly disagree = 0, (b) somewhat disagree = 1, (c) somewhat agree = 2, and (d) strongly agree = 3.

Chapter Summary

A survey was distributed to special education teachers and paraprofessionals on their perceptions of paraprofessional job roles and training levels. The prospective survey participants were given two weeks to respond electronically and in person. Thirteen special education teacher surveys and 18 paraprofessional surveys were returned with a total of 31 participant respondents. The survey participants included special education teachers and paraprofessionals from southwest suburban and Chicago elementary and high schools. The completed results of the surveys were used to compile data in this report. The frequencies, percentages, and averages are represented in graphical, tabular, and descriptive formats. The results of this data will be discussed further in Chapter V.

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to elicit the perceptions of special education teachers and paraprofessionals to determine their views on the most important paraprofessional roles and training opportunities offered to paraprofessionals. The special education teacher and paraprofessional survey results helped provide information on frequencies, percentages, and averages to determine how much time is spent in various paraprofessional job roles. The information retrieved from the survey results also presents data on formal and on-the-job training hours that are provided to paraprofessionals. With the increasing need for paraprofessionals, it is important to determine the most important paraprofessional roles and appropriate training requirements that must be offered to them. Identifying important job roles and providing adequate training to paraprofessionals will give them the skills and knowledge to effectively assist special education teachers to help students with disabilities improve academically, socially, and emotionally.

Paraprofessional Job Roles

Academic Instruction

According to the Department of Education (1999), there is an increased need for paraprofessionals to participate in instructional and learning support roles. Based on the results of this study, when special education teachers evaluated their most competent paraprofessional, 38% of survey respondents rated them as extremely competent when assisting students with remedial instruction activities and helping to reinforce skills previously taught. 54% of special educators responded that their most competent paraprofessionals were extremely competent in supporting students with assignments, make-up work, and work completion. This data shows that when the special education teacher was asked to rate their most competent paraprofessional,

approximately 50% or fewer of these teachers believed their paraprofessional to be extremely competent in these academic areas.

When looking at the frequency of time the most competent paraprofessional spent in each job role, the frequency of time the paraprofessionals spent on academic roles was very low. Only 23% of special educators stated that their most competent paraprofessional took part in the job role of providing direct instruction daily. When helping with daily planning activities, 15% stated that their paraprofessional participated in this role daily. When asked about their paraprofessional's role in reinforcing concepts, 31% stated that they took part in this role daily. When paraprofessionals were asked to evaluate assigned activities, 38% of special education teachers stated that their paraprofessional participated in this role daily. 15% of teachers responded that their paraprofessional participated in observing and recording student progress daily. Special education teachers responded that none of their paraprofessionals partake in creating instructional materials daily. When administering formal assessments daily, only 8% of special educators stated that their paraprofessional did this daily.

This study shows that based on the perceptions of the special education teacher, paraprofessionals do not spend a large frequency of time in academic roles daily. Paraprofessionals need to become more involved in academic job roles because based on the research, there is an increased emphasis on instructional and learner support roles (Department of Education, 1999). Paraprofessionals need to become more involved in academic job roles because this is one of the most important areas where special educators will need some of the greatest support.

When reviewing the paraprofessional responses on academic job roles, 50% stated that they provided direct instruction daily. 11% of paraprofessionals specified they were involved in

daily planning activities. 61% of paraprofessionals took part in the job role of reinforcing concepts daily. 17% of paraprofessionals stated that they participated daily in evaluating assigned activities. 33% were involved in observing and recording student progress daily, 6% in creating instructional materials daily, and none of the paraprofessionals respondents claimed that they administered formal assessments daily.

From the survey results, 61% and fewer paraprofessionals identified their daily participation in various academic job roles. In comparison, 38% and fewer special educators rated their paraprofessionals' participation in the various daily academic job roles. When identifying frequency of participation in many of the academic paraprofessional roles, low percentages of survey respondents identified participation in these roles daily. The results of this survey showed that paraprofessionals need to become more involved in assisting with students' academic daily progress by participating in more academic job roles daily.

Based on the special education teachers' responses on the paraprofessionals' contribution to learning, 54% strongly agreed that this was important. When reviewing the paraprofessional's knowledge in content areas such as reading, writing, and math 38% of special educators strongly agreed that they were knowledgeable in these areas. Of the paraprofessional survey respondents, 78% strongly agreed that they contributed to learning. 67% of paraprofessionals strongly agreed that they were knowledgeable in the reading, writing, and math content areas.

The special education teachers' perceptions concerning academics shows lower percentages when asked to strongly agree. Special educators show a lower percentage of agreement in these areas when compared to the paraprofessionals' views in these areas. This study shows that paraprofessionals believe their competency in academics to be greater than the special educators beliefs toward these areas.

Behavior Supervision and Implementation

Paraprofessionals also work in the roles of helping assist with behavior modification strategies and positive behavior supports and assisting with documentation of behavior. With emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), a paraeducator offers additional instructional and behavior management support for teachers and students (Maggin et al., 2009). When documenting behavior, 31% of special educators believed that their most competent paraprofessional was extremely competent in this area. When assisting with behavior modification and implementing positive behavior supports, 46% of special educators stated that their paraprofessional was extremely competent. With such low percentages, special education teachers have shown very little confidence that their most competent paraprofessionals are extremely competent in these two behavior areas.

When reviewing special education teacher respondent data in behavior, 77% of teachers stated that their most competent paraprofessional participates in the behavior job role daily. 89% of paraprofessional respondents stated that they participated in behavior roles daily. The high percentages show that paraprofessionals assist with children's behavior daily and this job role is very important. From the data provided, noting the importance of this role can clearly help administrators and other personnel make planning and training decisions to help teach paraprofessionals effective strategies when working with students on behavior issues.

Collaborator with Parents

Special education teacher respondents identified that their most competent paraprofessionals never communicated with their parents daily. When rating their level of agreement with their paraprofessionals being aware of family needs, 31% strongly agreed that the paraprofessional was aware of the unique needs of families. 0% of special educators

identified that their most competent paraprofessional participated in communicating with parents daily. When paraprofessionals rated their level of agreement with recognizing family needs, 7/18 (39%) stated that strongly agreed that they were aware of family needs. 28% of paraprofessional survey respondents stated that they communicated with parents daily. The perceptions from special education teachers and paraprofessionals in this job role based on frequency and levels of agreement were not very high. The frequencies and percentages from the data showed this job role to be less important than academics and behavior.

Self-Directed Activities

When special educators rated paraprofessionals in the job role of supervising children alone, 31% stated that they strongly agreed with this. 56% of paraprofessionals strongly agreed that they were supervising children alone. This data identifies that special educators and paraprofessionals have not followed the NCLB guidelines that a paraprofessional may not provide instructional services unless they are working under the direct supervision of a teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Administrators and schools districts must be aware that this is occurring and need to make provisions to be sure that this is not occurring within their schools.

Formal Training Opportunities

When paraprofessionals provided the number of formal training hours, the largest percentages were identified based on levels of training in each job role. 28% identified no training in remedial instruction and 28% identified little training (1-2 hours). 34% of paraprofessionals stated that they received little training (1-2 hours) in work support. With behavior modification strategies, the largest percentage (34%) stated that they received significant (10+ hours) of formal training. The greatest percentages of paraprofessional

respondents in the categories of documenting behavior, helping with physical disabilities, assisting with basic care needs, and carrying out clerical task stated that they received no formal training.

This data confirms the need to provide paraprofessionals more formal training opportunities. The highest percentage of paraprofessionals only identified the area of behavior modification strategies where they received the most amount of formal training (10+ hours). With most job roles, paraprofessionals were provided little to no formal training. If administrators and school districts want to hire and retain the most knowledgeable, skilled paraprofessionals to assist their special educators, they must be aware of the importance of providing professional development opportunities. Paraprofessional formal training levels must increase in most of the paraprofessional roles.

On-the-Job Training Opportunities

When special education teacher survey respondents were asked to identify the frequencies of on-the job training they provide to their paraprofessionals in various job roles, the highest percentages of respondents in each level of training was identified. The levels of training ranged from no training to significant. 38% of respondents stated that the most amount of training they provided was some (3-6 hours) in the areas of remedial instruction and work support. 38% of special educators provided little training (1-2 hours) in positive behavior supports and 31% of these respondents stated that little training (1-2 hours) was provided in documenting behavior. 46% stated that no training was provided by the special educator in physical disabilities, 62% identified no training in basic care, and 31% recognized that no training was provided with clerical duties. The highest percentage of paraprofessional respondents (35%) stated that little (1-2 hours) of on-the-job training was offered in remedial

instruction. 29% of paraprofessionals were offered this same amount of training in work support, 35% of paraprofessionals identified little training (1-2 hours) in behavior modification strategies and 35% identified some training (3-6 hours) in behavior modification. 34% identified little training (1-2 hours) in documenting behavior. In the categories of physical disabilities, basic care needs, and clerical duties, the highest percentage of paraprofessionals identified no training at all.

This data clearly illustrates that very little (1-2 hours) to no on-the-job training is provided to paraprofessionals in all job roles except for the area of behavior modification strategies where the same percentage (34%) of paraprofessionals stated that they received little and 34% of paraprofessionals stated receiving some (3-6 hours) on-the-job training. If schools have high expectations for their paraprofessionals and want to retain those individuals who can perform their jobs effectively, the data shows that more on-the-job training opportunities must be provided to paraprofessionals.

Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that based on special education teacher and paraprofessional survey respondents, the frequencies of job roles helped to identify the most important job roles performed by paraprofessionals. These job roles are listed from the largest to the smallest survey respondent frequencies. The largest percentage of special education teachers identified that paraprofessionals took part in job roles in behavior, recess and lunch, collaborating with teacher, evaluating activities daily, reinforcing concepts, and communicating with related service personnel daily. The largest percentage of paraprofessionals identified that they were involved in the job roles pertaining to behavior, recess and lunch, reinforcing

concepts, helping with assistive technology, providing direct instruction, and collaborating with teachers daily.

Recommendations

The data shows that the three most popular job roles identified by the special education teacher are behavior, collaborating with teacher, and reinforcing concepts as identified by the highest averages of job frequencies. The three most popular job roles identified by paraprofessionals are behavior, reinforcing concepts, and direct instruction and can be identified by observing the highest averages of job frequencies. The recommendations from this study would be to provide paraprofessionals more formal and on-the-job training opportunities in all areas especially the most popular job roles identified from the results of the surveys. Based on the data retrieved from the special education and paraprofessional teacher surveys, little to no training is being provided to paraprofessionals. If administrators and school districts want to hire and maintain confident paraprofessionals who can be successful in each of their job roles, they need to be knowledgeable and should be offered appropriate training opportunities in these areas.

Summary

The results of the surveys helped to identify some of the most important paraprofessional job roles including those in academics and behavior. When reviewing the perceptions of special education teachers and paraprofessionals, the data illustrates that both groups valued the importance of these two areas by their identification of frequencies and percentages of time the paraprofessionals spent in each of these roles. The data also shows that formal and on-the-job training opportunities for paraprofessionals are minimal to none. If school districts want to hire and retain competent paraprofessionals, they must be able to offer these training opportunities.

With the results of this study, administrators and school districts will realize that they must start to offer more training opportunities in many paraprofessional job roles.

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APPENDIX A: Paraprofessional Survey Participant Letter

Dear Paraprofessional,

I invite you to participate in an action research study entitled *Paraprofessionals' and Special Educators' Perceptions of the Paraprofessional's Role*. As part of this research study, I am collecting important information about the special education teachers' and the paraprofessionals' perceptions on the various paraprofessional roles and accompanying training opportunities and experiences required to perform this job. This action research study is a requirement of the Masters of Arts in Multicategorical Special Education degree that I am pursuing from Governors State University in University Park, Illinois.

Your professional opinions and expertise are highly regarded and the information that you provide will be most valuable to the results of my study. If you agree to participate, would you please complete and submit the survey within two weeks of receiving it. The data you provide will be beneficial in helping find ways to improve the paraprofessional position by identifying important job role requirements and appropriate training opportunities that will help prepare paraprofessionals to work confidently and efficiently within those identified roles. Please consider taking 10-15 minutes to complete the attached survey using your professional knowledge and experiences. Survey participant personal information will be kept strictly confidential and no data will be personally identified with you. All responses that you provide on this survey will be used for group data analysis pertaining to this research study only.

Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, would you please complete and submit the survey within two weeks of receiving it. You may choose not to answer any given questions, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time. There are no known risks beyond the inconvenience of time. Thank you for your consideration to participate in this action research project. Your assistance and input with this project is greatly appreciated.

Please note that by returning your completed questionnaire you are giving your consent to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this action research project or the attached survey, please feel free to contact me using the information below. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant please contact the Chair of the Governors State Institutional Review Board (IRB), Dr. Renée Theiss, at [REDACTED], or email at [REDACTED]. The IRB reviews research projects to insure the ethical conduct of research to human subjects.

Sincerely,

Rachela Nicholls
Student Researcher

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B: Paraprofessional Survey Questionnaire

Paraprofessional Survey

1) What is your gender?

Male Female

2) What is your age? _____

3) What is your highest level of education?

High School

Non-Degree College

Associate Degree

Bachelor Degree

Graduate Degree

4) How many years of experience do you have as a paraprofessional? _____

- 5) Using the following scale, identify the frequency that you participate in each of these roles as a paraprofessional?

1 = Never

2 = 1-2 times a week

3 = 3-4 times a week

4 = Daily

1	2	3	4	5	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Assist with classroom and behavior management				
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Monitor students outside of the classroom such as recess and lunch				
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Provide direct instruction				
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Assist in daily planning activities				
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Reinforce concepts already presented by teacher				
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Evaluate assigned activities using teacher guidelines				
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Observe and record student progress				
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Create instructional materials				
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Administer formal assessments				
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Help children with assistive technology devices				
<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Assist children with physical disabilities				
<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Help children with basic care needs				
<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Perform clerical tasks				
<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Communicate with parents				
<input type="checkbox"/>	15. Collaborate with special education teacher				
<input type="checkbox"/>	16. Communicate with related service personnel				

6) Using the following scale, select the amount (approximate clock hours) of formal training (workshop, in-service) you have received for each of the duties described:

- 1 = No formal training (0 hours)**
- 2 = Little formal training (1-2 hours)**
- 3 = Some formal training (3-6 hours)**
- 4 = Adequate formal training (7-9 hours)**
- 5 = Significant formal training (10+ hours)**

1	2	3	4	5	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Assist students with remedial instruction or reinforce skills that have been previously taught.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Support students with assignments, make-up work, or check for work completion.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Aid with behavior modification strategies, social skills, peer interactions, or positive behavior support plans.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Document behavior of individual students which includes writing down or tallying information and observations.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Help students with physical disabilities				
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Assist students with basic care needs				
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Carry out clerical duties				

7) Using the following scale, select the amount (approximate clock hours) of on-the-job training you have received for each of the duties described:

- 1 = No on-the-job training (0 hours)**
- 2 = Little on-the-job training (1-2 hours)**
- 3 = Some on-the-job training (3-6 hours)**
- 4 = Adequate on-the-job training (7-9 hours)**
- 5 = Significant on-the-job training (10+ hours)**

1	2	3	4	5	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Assist students with remedial instruction or reinforce skills that have been previously taught				
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Support students with assignments, make-up work, or check for work completion				

- 3. Aid with behavior modification strategies, social skills, peer interactions, or positive behavior support plans
- 4. Document behavior of individual students which includes writing down or tallying information and observations.
- 5. Help students with physical disabilities
- 6. Assist students with basic care needs
- 7. Carry out clerical duties

8) Using the following scale, identify your level of agreement with each statement:

- 1 = Strongly disagree**
- 2 = Somewhat disagree**
- 3 = Somewhat agree**
- 4 = Strongly agree**

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Your contributions affect how the children learn. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Your opinions are valued. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. You feel respected. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. You're adequately prepared. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. You're aware of children's needs. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. You're aware of the unique needs of the families. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. You're left alone to supervise the children in the classroom. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. You're knowledgeable in content areas such as reading, writing, and math. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. You participate in IFSP or IEP meetings. |

APPENDIX C: Special Education Teacher Survey Participant Letter

Dear Special Education Teacher,

I invite you to participate in an action research study entitled *Paraprofessionals' and Special Educators' Perceptions of the Paraprofessional's Role*. As part of this research study, I am collecting important information about the special education teachers' and the paraprofessionals' perceptions on the various paraprofessional roles and accompanying training opportunities and experiences required to perform this job. This action research study is a requirement of the Masters of Arts in Multicategorical Special Education degree that I am pursuing from Governors State University in University Park, Illinois.

Your professional opinions and expertise are highly regarded and the information that you provide will be most valuable to the results of my study. The data you provide will be beneficial in helping find ways to improve the paraprofessional position by identifying important job role requirements and appropriate training opportunities that will help prepare paraprofessionals to work confidently and efficiently within those identified roles. Please consider taking 10-15 minutes to complete the attached survey using your professional knowledge and experiences. Survey participant personal information will be kept strictly confidential and no data will be personally identified with you. All responses that you provide on this survey will be used for group data analysis pertaining to this research study only.

Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, would you please complete and submit the survey within two weeks of receiving it. You may choose not to answer any given questions, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time. There are no known risks beyond the inconvenience of time. Thank you for your consideration to participate in this action research project. Your assistance and input with this project is greatly appreciated.

Please note that by returning your completed questionnaire you are giving your consent to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this action research project or the attached survey, please feel free to contact me using the information below. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the co-chairs of the Governors State Institutional Review Board (IRB) or email [REDACTED]. The IRB reviews research projects to insure the ethical conduct of research to human subjects.

Sincerely,

Rachela Nicholls
Student Researcher
Governors State University

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX D: Special Education Teacher Survey

Special Education Teacher Survey

1) What is your gender?

Male Female

2) What is your age? _____

3) What is your highest level of education?

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctorate Degree

4) What type of teaching license do you hold?

Early Childhood

Elementary Education

Secondary Education

Alternative Certification

5) What endorsements do you have?

LBS 1

Reading

Math

Science

Language Arts

Social Science

6) How many years of experience do you have a special education teacher? _____

- 7) Using the following scale, based on the *most competent paraprofessional* you have worked with, select his/her level of competence while performing the following roles:

1 = Not applicable
2 = Not competent
3 = Somewhat competent
4 = Competent
5 = Extremely competent

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Assist students with remedial instruction or reinforce skills that have been previously taught |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Support students with assignments, make-up work, or check for work completion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Aid with behavior modification strategies, social skills, peer interactions, or positive behavior support plans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Document behavior of individual students which includes writing down or tallying information and observations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Help students with physical disabilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Assist students with basic care needs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Carry out clerical tasks |

- 8) Using the following scale, identify the frequency that the *most competent paraprofessional* you selected in the previous question spends in each of these roles:

1 = Never
2 = 1-2 times a week
3 = 3-4 times a week
4 = Daily

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Assist with classroom and behavior management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Monitor students outside of the classroom such as recess and lunch |

- 3. Provide direct instruction
- 4. Assist in daily planning activities
- 5. Reinforce concepts already presented by teacher
- 6. Evaluate assigned activities using teacher guidelines
- 7. Observe and records progress
- 8. Create instructional materials
- 9. Administer formal assessments
- 10. Help children with assistive technology devices
- 11. Assist children with physical disabilities
- 12. Help children with basic care needs
- 13. Perform clerical tasks
- 14. Communicate with parents
- 15. Collaborate with the special education teacher
- 16. Communicate with related service personnel

9) Using the following scale, select the amount (approximate clock hours) of on-the-job training you provide to your paraprofessionals for each of the duties described:

- 1 = No on-the-job training (0 hours)**
- 2 = Little on-the-job training (1-2 hours)**
- 3 = Some on-the-job training (3-6 hours)**
- 4 = Adequate on-the-job training (7-9 hours)**
- 5 = Significant on-the-job training (10+ hours)**

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Assist students with remedial instruction or reinforce skills that have been previously taught |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Support students with assignments, make-up work, or check for work completion |

- 3. Aid with behavior modification strategies, social skills, peer interactions, or positive behavior support plans
- 4. Document behavior of individual students which includes writing down or tallying information and observation.
- 5. Help students with physical disabilities
- 6. Assist students with basic care needs
- 7. Carry out clerical tasks

10) Using the following scale, identify your level of agreement with each statement pertaining to the paraprofessional's role:

- 1 = Strongly disagree**
- 2 = Somewhat disagree**
- 3 = Somewhat agree**
- 4 = Strongly agree**

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. The paraprofessional's contributions affect how the children learn. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. The paraprofessional's opinions are valued. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. The paraprofessional feels respected. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. The paraprofessional is adequately prepared. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. The paraprofessional is aware of children's needs. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. The paraprofessional is aware of the unique needs of the families. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. The paraprofessional is left alone to supervise the children in the classroom. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. The paraprofessional is knowledgeable in content areas such as reading, writing, and math. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. The paraprofessional participates in IFSP or IEP meetings |