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Involvement of Principals in Hiring, Professional Development, and Evaluation of Paraeducators

Jordan T. Hix

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Educational Specialist

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## ABSTRACT

### Involvement of Principals in Hiring, Professional Development, and Evaluation of Paraeducators

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Previous research has found paraeducators do not receive adequate training (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002), and are often infrequently evaluated –yearly or less often (Mueller, 2002; Morgan, Ashbaker, & Young, 2001). Little is known about principals’ practices relative to paraeducator training, and evaluation. To investigate these topics, a survey was distributed to principals that worked in a large suburban/rural school district in the western United States. Fifty-eight participants completed surveys at a district principals meeting.

The results of the study indicated a large majority of principals (78.95% for Title 1 paraeducators, 86.21% for special education paraeducators, and 75.86 for others) hired the paraeducators in their school and most principals (88.89% for Title 1 paraeducators, 86.21% for special education paraeducators, and 60.34% for other paraeducators) were aware of district policies regarding the hiring and/or employment of paraeducators. In contrast, the majority of principals were not aware of individual school policies pertaining to paraeducator hiring and employment. The majority of principals did not indicate that they were responsible for rating paraeducator performance. Furthermore, the majority of principals did not perform paraeducator observations, hold evaluative conferences, or link the results of paraeducator evaluation to professional development.

Keywords: Paraeducator, Paraprofessional, Teacher Aide, Principal, Administrator, Hiring, Evaluation, Supervision, Training, Professional Development

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## DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

This thesis is structured according to the Brigham Young University hybrid thesis standards. Pages 1 to 28 contain a journal-ready version of the thesis formatted according to American Psychological Association and journal specifications. Appendix A begins on page 29 and consists of an extended literature review containing additional background information relevant to the study. The survey instrument is located in Appendix B beginning on page 49.



## **Background**

The use of paraeducators in schools has increased in recent decades (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012). They are also referred to as paraprofessionals or teacher aides. Today paraeducators are a valued and integral part of the education system, found working in many different settings and performing an increasingly diverse variety of tasks. Some of their duties include direct physical care, language interpretation, direct instruction, and curriculum adaptation (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Warger, 2002). Within special education settings, paraeducators have a “fundamental and crucial role in the delivery of instruction to students” (French, 1998, p. 362). Paraeducators provide schools with a cost effective means to lower the adult to child ratio, and teachers report lower levels of stress and increased job satisfaction when they work with a paraeducator (French, 2003; Webster et al., 2010).

Two federal laws have impacted the use of paraeducators. The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) stated that “paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulation, or written policy” can “assist in the provision of special education and related services” (20 U.S.C. §1412 (a)(15)(B)). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) required that paraeducators working in Title 1 schools must have an associate's degree, at least two years of college, or pass a state assessment demonstrating competencies in several pertinent academic areas. NCLB also outlined appropriate paraeducator duties including classroom management, one-on-one tutoring, and supporting and assisting students in computer labs or libraries. NCLB specifically stated that a paraprofessional should not perform instructional duties unless directly supervised by a teacher.

## **Research on Paraeducators**

Numerous studies have reported inadequacies in paraeducator training, supervision, and evaluation (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Etscheidt, 2005; Mueller, 2002). A brief review of the research surrounding these issues follows.

Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman (2002) researched paraeducators at four Vermont schools and reported that almost none of the participants had any training before beginning work with students. Similarly, Downing et al. (2000) found that the majority of paraeducators surveyed did not receive adequate training when they began their employment. A 2010 study (Breton, 2010) surveyed paraeducators on a wide variety of topics including training. Nearly half of participants involved (46.3%) rated their preservice preparation as very poor to fair. When paraeducators did receive training, the benefits were debatable (Giangreco et al., 2002). According to Trautman (2004) in-service training for paraeducators often did not apply to their specific assignments or was simply too general to be of help. (The terms training and professional development are used interchangeably within this thesis.)

Paraeducator supervision is also an area of concern. Paraeducators are often responsible for directing their work and making important decisions (French, 2003). According to Etscheidt, paraeducators often work “independently and autonomously, isolated from direction and supervision” (2005, p. 77). Breton (2010) reported that many paraeducators received little, if any, supervision and the quality of supervision they did receive was inadequate.

Paraeducators have reported that they are infrequently evaluated—yearly or less often (Morgan, Ashbaker, & Young, 2001; Mueller, 2002). When they were evaluated it was often by those unfamiliar with them and the evaluations focused mainly on students rather than paraeducator performance (Ashbaker & Morgan 2001; Mueller, 2002). According to a study by

Breton (2010), 39.5% of paraeducators reported never being evaluated. (This study looked specifically at evaluations by special education teachers.)

### **Principals' Role with Paraeducators**

Principals are the lead administrators working in elementary, junior, and senior high schools (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). They are responsible for acting as a model and resource for teachers and other staff, ensuring that effective instructional practices are utilized by teachers, hiring and evaluating staff, and observing classrooms (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

Little has been written specifically about the association of principals and paraeducators and their relationship to the school instructional system. Two articles were identified. Wallace, Stahl, and Johnson (2003) looked closely at paraeducators and principals working in Minnesota schools. They found that according to paraeducators, principals were the individuals most often responsible for paraeducator evaluations and were second most likely to be their supervisors, behind only special education teachers. Ashbaker and Morgan (2006) provided specific guidance to administrators such as “provide an organized infrastructure for the system to accommodate the employment, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals” and “provide support through availing resources for the preservice training, offering basic training in teamwork, and ensuring that the system of evaluation and rewards is in place to recognize good work” (pp. 18-19).

Although there is little literature on paraeducators and principals, there is a large body of research and recommendations regarding principals and teachers. Although teachers and paraeducators differ in their responsibilities and training, it is logical that many best practices

and recommendations regarding teachers would be generalizable to paraeducators. A brief overview of some of these recommendations and best practices follows.

Rather than a few non-teaching days for teacher professional development, “job-embedded, site-based professional development offers the best venue for educators' ongoing learning” (DeFour, 2004, para. 12). Effective professional development facilitates collaboration among teachers as they assess student performance, analyze data, and “help each other develop and implement strategies to improve current levels of student learning” (DeFour, 2004, para. 2).

Teacher supervision is often integrated into teacher evaluation. Nolan and Hoover (2004) suggest that teacher evaluation and supervision are “separate but complimentary functions” (p. 6). Teacher evaluation involves judgments of teacher quality and competence, while supervision aims to improve teacher performance (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). Although the following paragraphs refer specifically to evaluation, the recommendations also apply to effective supervision.

Successful teacher evaluation involves significant amounts of time, a systematic approach, and effort on both the part of the principal and teacher (Evertson & Holley, 1981; Helm, 1997; Peterson, 2000). Data used to evaluate teachers should be gathered from a variety of sources (Evertson & Holley, 1981; Peterson, 2000). One critical source of data is the classroom observation. Observations should be performed two to five times with each visit lasting no longer than an hour (Evertson & Holley, 1981). Other sources of data include “student reports...student achievement data...parent reports, [and] documentation of professional activity” (Peterson, 2000, pp. 93-97).

Effective teacher evaluation also features an evaluative conference. Prior to the conference the principal should review the teacher’s job description, past evaluative data, and

performance information (Helm, 1997). It also includes providing the teacher with a copy of the evaluation forms for self-appraisal, and asking the teacher to “be prepared to discuss successes, unmet challenges, what interferes with his or her best performance, and what the teacher or school system can do to help the teacher achieve his or her goals” (Helm, 1997, p. 254).

Planning for professional development activities and goals are born out of the evaluative conference. Evaluative conferences should be a part of an “ongoing supervisory [system] that [approximate] the coaching function, with regular, immediate, and specific feedback” (Helm, 1997, p. 266). Professional development activities and planning logically follow the discussion.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Previous studies have reported that paraeducators are often undertrained, lacking supervision and infrequently evaluated, even though this population is often charged with helping children who “need the most specialized help” (Snodgrass, 1991, p. 5) and who cannot advocate for themselves. It is vital that paraeducators provide appropriate and effective service. Principals are responsible for hiring and evaluating the staff in their school (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; Stronge et al., 2008), yet it is unclear how involved they are in hiring and evaluating paraeducators. If improvements are to be made regarding the effective use of paraeducators, as previous research suggests are needed, a better understanding of the current practices regarding their work is also needed.

### **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the level of involvement principals have with paraeducators. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. Do principals hire the paraeducators in their schools?
2. Are principals aware of school or district policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?
3. How are principals involved in paraeducator evaluation?
4. Are evaluation results linked to professional development?
5. Is principal involvement with paraeducators related to years in administration?

### **Method**

The method chosen to gather information in this study was a survey instrument distributed to school principals. This section provides a detailed description of the methodology of the study. The participating sample is described in detail, followed by a description of the instrument. The procedure is described followed by a description of the methods of statistical analysis.

Prior to contacting the participating individuals and districts, permission to proceed with the study was received from the Brigham Young University Institutional Review Board (IRB). An informed consent document was approved by the IRB and provided to each study participant.

### **Participants**

Participants were administrators from a school district located in the western United States. The school district served approximately 71,000 students (ProximityOne, 2013). Study participants participated at a school district meeting for elementary, middle school, and high school principals in September 2012. The study sample consisted of 58 administrators. Twenty-one identified themselves as female (36%), and 37 identified as males (64%). Participants reported years of employment in administration ranging from 1 to 33 years ( $M = 9.35$ ,  $SD = 7.54$ ). Age, ethnicity, and racial demographic information were not collected. However, it is

probable that the majority of participants were Caucasian. Ninety-one percent of the population of the county in which the district is located were Caucasian (United States Census Bureau, 2013).

### **Instrument**

The Survey of Current Administrators' Practices Relative to Paraeducators (SCAPRP) (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000; Appendix B) was developed, field tested and deemed valid by Drs. Betty Y. Ashbaker and Jill Morgan in 2000 at Utah State University. Six yes or no questions were presented that pertained to the administrator's involvement with paraeducators in reference to their hiring, their evaluation, their knowledge of availability of district or state training programs for paraeducators, and paraeducator general policies. Four paraeducators employment categories were provided: Title I, special education, bilingual, and bus aide. An additional other column was also available. This column was provided for paraeducators who are not classified in the previously mentioned categories. For the current study the Bus Aide and Bilingual categories were removed from the survey. This was done to focus the survey on paraeducators with classroom related assignments and to minimize data not relevant to the current study. Additionally, the current version was modified to include questions pertaining to years of employment as an administrator and job title. This was done to investigate whether or not years in administration were related to paraeducator involvement. The survey also contained a question that asked administrators to identify how many paraeducators worked in their schools. Finally, participants were asked if there were specific areas where they would benefit from more support or tools in regard to working with paraeducators and they were given the opportunity to write a detailed explanation if they preferred.

Multiple survey items were clustered to answer the research study questions. The correspondence of the first four research questions to survey questions is depicted in Table 1. The fifth research question, *Is principal involvement with paraeducators related to years in administration?*, was answered by using a One-Way Analysis of Variance Test (ANOVA) to determine if years in administration was linked to an increase or decrease in paraeducator involvement. It is hypothesized that education leadership and other administration training programs may be placing an increased focus on paraeducators. Thus, graduates of these programs would be more aware of paraeducator issues and in turn more engaged in their work. The level of paraeducator involvement was based on the number of survey items where the participant answered yes.



Table 1

*Correspondence of Research Questions to Survey Questions*

Research Questions	Corresponding Survey Questions
Do principals hire the paraeducators in their schools?	(Q1) Do you hire the paraeducator?
Are principals aware of school or district policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	(Q2) Does your district have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?
	(Q3) Does your school have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?
How are principals involved in paraeducator evaluation?	(Q4) Do you observe paraeducators for evaluative purposes?
	(Q5) Do you hold evaluative conferences with paraeducators?
	(Q6) Are you responsible for rating paraeducator performance?
Are evaluation results linked to professional development?	(Q7) Is paraeducator professional development directly linked to the components/criteria of the evaluation process?

*Note.* The final research question did not correspond to a specific survey item.

**Procedure**

Study participation was requested of four neighboring school districts. These districts were chosen by convenience sampling due to their close proximity to the researchers. The primary researcher contacted the districts via telephone and email. Formal research proposals were submitted to three of the four school district's research review boards. Research proposal procedures were not obtained from one district after multiple failed attempts. One district

declined to participate, citing no foreseen advantages to participation. The review boards at two of the school districts provided initial consent for the study to proceed. Once approval was received, the primary researcher contacted district employees via telephone to identify specific meetings in which the instrument could be distributed. Meetings were identified for both school districts; however, administration at one of the two districts elected to not allow the instrument to be distributed in the proposed fashion. No reason or rationale was given. Other methods of distribution were considered; but due to time constraints, other options were abandoned.

The instrument, a survey, was sent via email from the primary researcher and printed by an attending employee of the participating school district. The administrator passed out the surveys near the end of the administrator meeting, and asked those in attendance to complete them. The completed surveys were collected and sent to the primary researcher. It is unknown what percentage of administrators in attendance completed the survey. However, as the district was comprised of 80 schools, if 80 principals were in attendance, 58 completed surveys would be a response rate of 72.5%.

### **Data Analysis**

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, descriptive statistics were utilized. Specifically, the percentage of participants that responded yes or no to each of the survey items were calculated and reported for each category (special education, Title 1, other). Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) was used to investigate the possibility of a relationship between years of employment in administration and level of involvement with paraeducators. To calculate the ANOVA, the participants' responses were sorted into four groups based on years in administration (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16+ years). The quantity of questions

with a *yes* answer provided data to represent the level of paraeducator involvement for the ANOVA.

## **Results**

This study sought to identify the level of involvement of principals in the hiring, evaluation, and professional development of paraeducators. Data were gathered by use of the Survey of Current Administrators' Practices Relative to Paraeducators (SCAPRP).

### **Survey Responses**

Fifty-eight surveys were completed. Table 2 presents the percentages of participants who responded yes for questions regarding Title 1 paraeducators. Although some participants answered all of the survey questions, many left some items unanswered. Only a portion of the schools in the sampled district employed Title 1 paraeducators. Items left unanswered regarding Title 1 paraeducators were excluded from the analysis displayed in Table 2. Thus, the percentages were calculated by dividing the number of yes responses by the total number of responses (excluding those left blank).

Table 2

*Percentage of Participants who Responded Yes for Title I Paraeducators*

Survey Question	Percent answered yes	Yes/No	Unanswered
(Q1) Do you hire the paraeducator?	78.95	(15 yes/4 no)	39
(Q2) Does your district have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	88.89	(16 yes/2 no)	40
(Q3) Does your school have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	16.67	(3 yes/15 no)	40
(Q4) Do you observe paraeducators for evaluative purposes?	28.57	(4 yes/10 no)	44
(Q5) Do you hold evaluative conferences with paraeducators?	14.29	(2 yes/12 no)	44
(Q6) Are you responsible for rating paraeducator performance?	30.77	(4 yes/9 no)	45
(Q7) Is paraeducator professional development directly linked to the components/criteria of the evaluation process?	18.18	(2 yes/9 no)	47

*Note.* Some items were left unanswered, thus the sum of the yes and no responses for each item is less than the sample size (n=58).

The percentage of participants who responded yes for questions regarding special education paraeducators is displayed in Table 3. To calculate the percentages, the number of yes responses was divided by the total sample size (n=58). Unlike Title 1 paraeducators, it was predicted that special education paraeducators were employed in all schools. Items left unanswered were grouped with answers marked no.

Table 3

*Percentage of Participants who Responded Yes for Special Education Paraeducators*

Survey Question	Percent answered yes	Yes/No	Unanswered
(Q1) Do you hire the paraeducator?	86.21	(50 yes/6 no)	2
(Q2) Does your district have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	86.21	(50 yes/4 no)	4
(Q3) Does your school have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	37.93	(22 yes/33 no)	3
(Q4) Do you observe paraeducators for evaluative purposes?	29.31	(17 yes/38 no)	3
(Q5) Do you hold evaluative conferences with paraeducators?	25.86	(15 yes/40 no)	4
(Q6) Are you responsible for rating paraeducator performance?	31.03	(18 yes/36 no)	4
(Q7) Is paraeducator professional development directly linked to the components/criteria of the evaluation process?	17.24	(10 yes/38 no)	10

*Note.* Some items were left unanswered, thus the sum of the yes and no responses for each item is less than the sample size (n=58).

Table 4 presents the percentages of participants who responded yes for questions regarding all other paraeducators. These percentages were calculated in the same manner as those displayed in Table 3 regarding special education paraeducators. Items left unanswered were included in the denominator.

Table 4

*Percentage of Participants who Responded Yes for Other Paraeducators*

Survey Question	Percent answered yes	Yes/No	Unanswered
(Q1) Do you hire the paraeducator?	75.86	(44 yes/2 no)	12
(Q2) Does your district have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	60.34	(35 yes/4 no)	19
(Q3) Does your school have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	18.97	(11 yes/32 no)	15
(Q4) Do you observe paraeducators for evaluative purposes?	29.31	(17 yes/27 no)	14
(Q5) Do you hold evaluative conferences with paraeducators?	20.69	(12 yes/31 no)	15
(Q6) Are you responsible for rating paraeducator performance?	31.03	(18 yes/25 no)	15
(Q7) Is paraeducator professional development directly linked to the components/criteria of the evaluation process?	15.52	(9 yes/29 no)	20

*Note.* Some items were left unanswered, thus the sum of the yes and no responses for each item is less than the sample size (n=58).

### **Need for Additional Support**

The last survey question asked participants if there were any specific areas where they felt they would benefit from more support and/or tools in dealing with paraeducators. If they answered affirmatively, space to elaborate was provided. Twenty-three of 58 participants indicated they would benefit from more tools and/or supports (39.66%). The primary researcher used four categories to code the responses: hiring, training, evaluation, and other. Eight administrators' responses pertained to paraeducator evaluation, 13 pertained to additional paraeducator training, three dealt with hiring, and two included other topics (scheduling and collaboration). Some administrators included more than one area of need (i.e., evaluation and training).

### **Interaction Between Years of Employment and Level of Involvement**

The final research question asked if principal involvement was related to their years working as an administrator. To answer this question, survey results were divided into four groups based on the individual's number of years in administration. Fifty-two respondents provided the number of years they have worked in administration. Using non-demographic questions one through six, a mean number of affirmative responses was calculated. This was done for each group: 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, and 16+ years in administration. Only responses pertaining to special education paraeducators were included in the analysis, due to the high number of participant responses for this category. The questions pertaining to administrator demographics and the final item regarding additional support and/or tools that an administrator felt he or she needed were excluded from this analysis as they were not dichotomous yes/no questions that relate to paraeducator involvement. A One-Way Analysis of Variance Test (ANOVA) was chosen to identify any potential relationship between years in administration and

paraeducator involvement. An ANOVA was chosen due to its ability to detect statistically significant relationships between multiple variables. The results of the ANOVA are provided in Table 5. No statistically significant difference between groups was identified ( $F(3, 48) = .06, p = .98$ ). Thus it does not appear that overall involvement with paraeducators was related to principal's years in administration.

Table 5

*ANOVA Results for Years in Administration and Paraeducator Involvement*

Summary

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Sample size</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<i>1 to 5 years</i>	19	59	3.10526	1.76608
<i>6 to 10 years</i>	19	63	3.31579	4.00585
<i>11 to 15 years</i>	8	25	3.12500	1.55357
<i>16 +years</i>	6	19	3.16667	2.16667

ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-level</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	0.47385	3	0.15795	0.06036	0.98035*	3.59893
Within Groups	125.60307	48	2.61673			
<i>Total</i>	126.07692	51				

Note. \* $p > .05$ .

## Discussion

Previous research has indicated that paraeducators are often undertrained and under-evaluated (Downing et al., 2000; Mueller, 2002). As principals are the lead administrators in the school, an understanding of their current practices relative to paraeducators is vital to ensure that paraeducators are properly trained and evaluated. This study examined the role principals have in paraeducator hiring, evaluation, and training (professional development). A discussion of the results organized by research questions is as follows.



## **Hiring**

Approximately 86% of principals reported that they hired the paraeducators working in special education (78.95% for Title 1 paraeducators, and 75.86% for other paraeducators). Of the activities included in the survey, principals reported participating in hiring most frequently. This is true for all paraeducators (special education, Title 1, and others).

Most principals reported they hired the paraeducators in their schools, therefore they have some responsibility for paraeducator performance. As indicated previously, principals are the lead administrators on the school level (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). This suggested a level of responsibility for all staff and students. However, if someone other than the principal hired paraeducators, the principal might not feel a sense of ownership or responsibility to see that that individual was properly trained, supervised, and evaluated.

## **Knowledge of Policies**

Just over 86% of principals indicated their district had policies regarding the work and employment of special education paraeducators (88.89% for Title 1 paraeducators, and 60.34% for other paraeducators). That policies existed and the principals were aware of them suggests paraeducator employment had received district attention and that steps were taken to provide regulation pertaining to their work. These results are encouraging, however, it is important to note these results provide no specifics concerning the actual district policies. They may be general in nature with few specific guidelines, or they may be detailed, comprehensive, research based, and pertaining to many facets of paraeducator work. The district policies were not examined in this study.

In contrast to the district policies, only 37.93% of principals indicated their school had policies regarding the work and employment of special education paraeducators. This

percentage was even smaller for Title 1 paraeducators (16.67%) and all other paraeducators (18.97%). This discrepancy may be interpreted in multiple ways. Schools may not have their own paraeducator policies because the district policies are viewed as adequate or satisfactory and thus, individual school policies would not be necessary. However, it is also possible that the policy makers on the individual school level, such as principals, have not considered the need for guidelines or procedures pertaining to paraeducator employment and work or that they have considered the need for guidelines and policies, but given the demand on their time, such documents have not yet been established.

### **Principal Involvement in Evaluation**

Paraeducators often work with students in need of “the most specialized help” (Snodgrass, 1991, p. 5). Effective evaluation ensures these students receive the quality services they deserve and require by law. The results of question six provide the best estimate to the percentage of principals that were involved in paraeducator evaluation. Specifically, this item asked participants to indicate if they were responsible for rating paraeducator performance. Just over 31% of principals who responded to this question indicated that they were responsible for rating special education paraeducator performance (30.77% for Title 1 paraeducators, and 30.03% for all other paraeducators). Thus approximately 70% of principals responded they were not responsible for rating paraeducator performance.

That so few principals reported they were responsible for rating paraeducator performance is surprising given that the principal is the lead administrator in the school. However, it may be possible in many schools paraeducator evaluation was delegated to a supervising teacher or other staff member. Paraeducators in one study (Wallace et al., 2003) reported principals to be the individuals most often responsible for their evaluations, followed by

special education teachers. Delegating evaluation responsibilities to a special education teacher may be a logical choice as they often work closely with paraeducators, directing their day-to-day work. Breton (2010) found just over half (51.6 %) of paraeducators reported receiving evaluations once a year by special education teachers. A closer look at the responses pertaining to evaluative activities was warranted.

Just over 29% of the principals who responded indicated that they observed special education paraeducators as part of their evaluations. This percentage varied just slightly for Title 1 (28.57%) paraeducators, and was the same and all other paraeducators. It is unfortunate for students and paraeducators that so few principals reported performing observations. Furthermore, of those participants who reported they were responsible for rating special education paraeducator performance, only 56% indicated that they observed (25% for Title 1, 50% for all other paraeducators). Thus, nearly half of special education paraeducators were evaluated and rated without having been observed by their evaluator. As discussed previously, effective evaluation consists of multiple observations over a period of time where data is obtained in a systematic manner (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). Considering the wide spectrum of data sources principals are encouraged to draw from for staff evaluations, observations may be seen as a minimum requirement for an evaluation.

Another recommended component of effective evaluation is the evaluative conference (Helm, 1997). Twenty-five percent of principals indicated they held evaluative conferences with special education paraeducators (14.29% for Title 1 paraeducators, and 20.69% for all others). This suggests that many paraeducators are missing out on opportunities to receive valuable summative and formative feedback. It also provides the paraeducator with a time to voice concerns pertaining to their training, and request needed instruction. Looking closer, of those

principals who reported they were responsible for rating special education paraeducator performance, only 44% indicated they held evaluative conferences. Evaluative conferences provide principals with an opportunity to acknowledge and praise paraeducator and student successes, and provide essential direction and correction when needed. Without principal observations and evaluative conferences, one wonders what measures are in place to ensure paraeducators are working effectively and appropriately with students.

It is worth noting that it may be that the majority of study participants did not engage in paraeducator observations or conferences, and indicated they were not responsible for rating paraeducator performance because another individual such as a special education teacher handled these activities. When Breton (2010) investigated paraeducator evaluation completed by special education teachers, 39.5% of paraeducators reported never being evaluated. However, these two studies utilized districts in various parts of the United States, and practices pertaining to paraeducator evaluation likely vary substantially from district to district.

### **Evaluation and Professional Development**

Just greater than 17% of principals indicated that professional development was linked to evaluation results for special education paraeducators (18% for Title 1 and 15.52% for all others). As discussed previously, research suggested paraeducators are often undertrained and when they did receive training it did not pertain to their duties (Downing et al., 2000; Trautman, 2004). Planning for appropriate professional development activities is a logical next step after identifying areas of weakness and needed growth during the evaluation process, and it ensures professional development activities are relevant and applicable.

### **Years in Administration**

The last research question asked if the level of principal involvement with paraeducators was related to their years in administration. As a population, paraeducators are more visible than in the past. As a result, it was hypothesized that this increased focus on paraeducators may have impacted education leadership and other administration training programs. Thus, principals with more recent training would be more aware of paraeducator issues and in turn more engaged in their work. However, the survey results suggested no statistically significant relationship between years in administration and paraeducator involvement. This leads to multiple possible interpretations.

Principal training programs may not be placing emphasis on paraeducators or providing guidance on appropriate training, supervision, and evaluation for paraeducators. Conversely, training programs may be placing an increased focus on paraeducators, but schools and school districts may lack the infrastructure and supports to allow a principal to be more actively engaged in paraeducator work, and to ensure students are receiving effective instruction and support. A third possible interpretation is that many administrators, no matter how many years of experience they have, are stretched too thin. They may not have sufficient time to engage in the recommended evaluation and training activities described previously.

Finally, 39.66% of administrators indicated that they would benefit from additional tools or support pertaining to paraeducators. In this study, eight responses pertained to paraeducator evaluation, 13 pertained to additional paraeducator training, three dealt with hiring, and two included other topics (scheduling and collaboration). Not every individual utilized the write-in portion of the survey. That participants wrote in a variety of issues suggests that the district

policies pertaining to paraeducators, which the large majority of participants indicated that they were aware of, may be in need of expansion or revision.

### **Limitations**

The current study included several limitations. All participants in the current study were surveyed from one suburban/rural school district with approximately 71,000 students (ProximityOne, 2013) in the western United States. As district policies pertaining to paraeducators and the individuals responsible for their hiring, training, supervision and evaluation vary greatly from district to district and in dissimilar regions of the United States, the current study results cannot be generalized to other districts and regions. Furthermore, as indicated previously, the large majority of individuals (93.4%) within the sampled district boundaries were Caucasian, thus the results may not be representative of districts with greater ethnic/racial diversity in their administrative leadership.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of involvement of principals with the paraeducators in their schools. Principals are the lead administrators on the individual school level (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). They play an active role in the hiring, training, supervising, and evaluating of teachers. However, little was known about their involvement with paraeducators. Paraeducators, also known as teacher aides and paraprofessionals, provide a variety of services within many classrooms and often work closely with children with special needs. Previous research indicated that these valuable employees are often undertrained, under-supervised, and under-evaluated (Downing et al., 2000; Etscheidt, 2005; Mueller, 2002).

The current study surveyed 58 principals about their involvement with paraeducators. The principals worked for a large suburban/rural school district in the United States. Participation was voluntary and the surveys were anonymous.

The results of the study indicated that a large majority of principals hired the paraeducators in their school and most principals were aware of district policies regarding the hiring and/or employment of paraeducators. In contrast, the majority of principals were not aware of any individual school policies pertaining to paraeducator hiring and employment.

The survey items queried principals about their practices relating to paraeducator evaluation and training. The majority of principals indicated that they were responsible for rating paraeducator performance. The majority of principals did not perform paraeducator observations, hold evaluative conferences, or link the results of paraeducator evaluation to professional development. Students deserve and require well-trained, supervised, and effectively evaluated paraeducators. It is promising that a portion of principals surveyed reported that they observed paraeducators, held evaluative conferences, and linked the evaluation results to professional development activities. However, the current study results suggest the majority of principals are not actively involved with paraeducators in their schools. It is this researcher's hope that the present research will act as a catalyst for principals and other administrators to evaluative their own practices, and seek to make improvements based on the research recommended practices.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The results of the current study suggest that there are many questions still to be answered. Future research studies could directly investigate school district policies pertaining to the hiring, training, and evaluation of paraeducators. The current study included only one district. Future

studies would benefit from investigating multiple districts. Additionally, future studies should look at the division of responsibility relating to paraeducator supervision and evaluation. The current study was limited in its scope to the practices of administrators. Future studies could determine if special education teachers or district employees are responsible for paraeducator evaluation when principals indicate that they are not.

Future research should also focus on the impact of engaging in best-practice paraeducator training, evaluation and supervision on student achievement and what education leadership and other school administrator training programs are teaching future principals about their responsibilities relative to paraeducators.

### **Implications for Principals**

Working principals can benefit from the current study by investigating how they currently work with paraeducators and asking themselves the following questions. Are they following the recommendations from experts? Specifically, do they perform multiple observations and utilize various sources of data for paraeducator evaluation, hold evaluative conferences and tie the results of the evaluation to on-going site-based professional development activities? How can they increase their involvement with paraeducators and improve paraeducator evaluation and training? Does their district have policies pertaining to the hiring and/or employment of paraeducators? What policies does their school have, and what areas should new policies and guidance focus on?



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## **Appendix A**

### **Review of Literature**

Paraeducators, also known as paraprofessionals or teacher aides, are common in the United States. This review will discuss the history of the use of paraeducators as well as describe their current responsibilities and some advantages of their employment. Two Federal laws regarding paraeducators will be highlighted. Relevant research findings in the areas of paraeducator training supervision, evaluation, and their use in general will be discussed. Next, the typical duties of a school principal will be described including their role in teacher hiring, training, supervision and evaluation. Finally, there will be a description of how a principal's role and involvement with teachers might mirror their practice with paraeducators.

#### **History and Current Practice of Using Paraeducators**

Paraeducator employment and the breadth of their duties have increased in recent decades (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012). Originally, primarily assigned clerical duties, today they are often called upon to perform activities such as curriculum adaptation, language interpretation, direct physical care, and direct instruction (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Warger, 2002). They work in both general education and special education settings. Within special education settings, paraeducators have a “fundamental and crucial role in the delivery of instruction to students” (French, 1998, p. 362). Furthermore, paraeducator use has increased in general education settings as more students receiving special education services are mainstreamed (Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002). Paraeducators also work in libraries, and with support services such as occupational and physical therapy. Paraeducators are most often women over the age of 40 (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Breton, 2010). Many have children attending the school(s) in

which they work, and are a part of the community or neighborhood in which their school is located (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Giangreco et al., 2002).

There are many benefits to the use of paraeducators. Teachers have reported lower levels of stress and increased job satisfaction when they work with a paraeducator (Webster et al., 2010). They are also economical for districts to hire, they provide a connection to the community, offer personalized support to children with disabilities, and increase the adult-child classroom ratio (French, 2003).

To help administrators appropriately place and utilize paraeducators, Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer (2001) published *A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports*. This document acts as a handbook to help administrators and others improve the use of and support of paraeducators. Similarly, Giangreco and Broer (2007) have also developed an instrument that helps administrators determine if their school is over-utilizing paraeducators. Although paraeducators bring many benefits to the classroom, recent research indicates improper paraeducator use may result in unforeseen negative consequences. This topic will be discussed in greater depth in a later section.

### **Federal Legislation Regarding Paraeducators**

Government legislative acts have also provided guidance and direction to the use of paraeducators. Two laws that significantly impact the use of paraprofessionals warrant further discussion. These are the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) and the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) included new educational requirements for paraeducators, and outlined appropriate paraeducator duties and responsibilities. These requirements apply specifically to individuals working in Title 1 schools.

Under NCLB, paraeducators need to have an associate's degree, at least two years of college, or pass a state assessment demonstrating competencies in several pertinent academic areas (NCLB, 2002). Some of the responsibilities and duties paraeducators may have include assisting with classroom management, one-on-one tutoring, and supporting and assisting students in computer labs or libraries. NCLB specifically states that a paraprofessional should not perform instructional duties unless directly supervised by a teacher (NCLB, 2002).

Further clarification is given in respect to the NCLB paraeducator requirements in *Title I Paraprofessionals, Non-Regulatory Guidance* published in March of 2004. Specifically, the document states that

Paraprofessionals who provide instructional support must work under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher...A paraprofessional works under the direct supervision of a teacher if (1) the teacher prepares the lessons and plans the instructional support activities the paraprofessional carries out, and evaluates the achievement of the students with whom the paraprofessional is working, and (2) the paraprofessional works in close and frequent proximity with the teacher. (pp. 10-11)

The document continues by stating

A program where a paraprofessional provides instructional support and a teacher visits a site once or twice a week but otherwise is not in the classroom, or a program where a paraprofessional works with a group of students in another location while the teacher provides instruction to the rest of the class would also be inconsistent with the requirement that paraprofessionals work in close and frequent proximity to a teacher. (p. 11)

The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 applies to all schools receiving government monies, and mandates that paraeducators be appropriately trained and supervised. Specifically, IDEIA states that “paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulation, or written policy” can “assist in the provision of special education and related services” (20 U.S.C. §1412 (a)(15)(B)). As a result of this legislature, all paraeducators (working in special education or providing related services) need to be appropriately trained and supervised. Additionally, IDEIA clearly states that paraprofessionals can *assist* in providing services to students, thus they should not be the primary source of student instruction.

In sum, both NCLB and IDEIA include important requirements related to the employment of paraprofessionals in elementary and secondary education. Paraeducators should be appropriately educated, trained, and supervised. Additionally, they are permitted to assist in the instruction of students. These requirements as well as related topics have been the focus of a growing body of research focused on paraeducator employment and efficacy. Important findings are listed in the following section.

### **Paraeducator Research**

Key research involving paraeducators can be divided into several broad areas: training, supervision, evaluation, and other research. The following sections discuss each of these areas in detail and provide an overview of the important research findings.

**Paraeducator training.** Research has shown that paraeducators do not receive adequate training (Giangreco et al., 2002). The terms “trial by fire” and “fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants” were used by paraeducators in one study to describe their experiences working with students after receiving little or no training (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000, p. 177). Giangreco et al.



(2002) researched paraeducators at four Vermont schools and reported that almost none of the participants had any training before beginning work with students. Similarly, Downing et al. (2000) interviewed paraeducators about their experiences working in inclusive classrooms. They reported that the majority of paraeducators interviewed did not receive training at the beginning of their employment.

When paraeducators do receive training, at times the benefits are debatable (Giangreco et al., 2002). According to Trautman (2004) in-service training for paraeducators often does not apply to their specific assignments or is simply too general to be of help. Similarly, paraeducators in another study reported a disconnect between the skills they needed and the in-service training that was offered to them (Downing et al., 2000). One principal stated “To be perfectly honest with you, I think that in-service training for paras is a real weakness in our program. We invite them to attend training with the teachers, but a lot of times it’s not relevant to them” (Giangreco et al., 2002, p. 60).

Recent research shows that inadequate training continues to be a concern for paraeducators. A 2010 study (Breton, 2010) surveyed paraeducators on a wide variety of topics including training. Nearly half of participants involved (46.3%) rated their preservice preparation as very poor to fair. Although this implies that more than half of paraeducators rated their preservice training favorably, one must ask if it is acceptable for nearly one in every two paraeducators entering the field with a perceived lack of training.

**Supervision of paraeducators.** Although the need for proper paraeducator supervision is both intuitive and required by law, paraeducators often work “independently and autonomously, isolated from direction and supervision” (Etscheidt, 2005, p. 77). According to Breton (2010), many paraeducators receive little, if any, supervision and the quality of

supervision they do receive is inadequate. Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, and Fialka (2005) stated that the physical proximity between many paraeducators and special education teachers has increased as more students with special needs are included in general education classrooms. The increased physical distance between many special education teachers and paraeducators creates an obstacle for successful supervision.

Paraeducators often are responsible for directing their work and making important decisions without written or existent plans (French, 2003). This is a significant problem, as these individuals often have not received formal training in general or special education. Beyond day-to-day supervision, researchers have looked at the amount of evaluation paraeducators receive.

**Evaluation of paraeducators.** Paraeducators have reported that they are often infrequently evaluated—yearly or less often (Morgan, Ashbaker, & Young, 2001; Mueller, 2002). One paraeducator summed up their experience with evaluation this way, “In the nine years I worked in this district, I have received two evaluations!” (Mueller, 2002, p. 64). Because paraeducators are often under-trained and under-supervised, it is important that competent professionals evaluate them regularly. Effective paraeducator evaluation reinforces and supports positive behavior, and also identifies and responds appropriately to ineffective practices and employees. However, this type of evaluation appears to be the exception rather than the norm. When paraeducators are evaluated it is often by those unfamiliar with them and the evaluations focus mainly on students rather than paraeducator performance (Ashbaker & Morgan 2001; Mueller, 2002).

According to Breton (2010), just over half (51.6 %) of paraeducators reported receiving evaluations once a year, while nearly 39.5% reported never being evaluated. (This study looked specifically at evaluations by special education teachers.) Although it is encouraging that half of

paraeducators surveyed in this recent study were evaluated yearly, clearly there is a problem when less than 9% of paraeducators reported being evaluated more than once a year. As previously mentioned, paraeducators often work in isolation from the special education teachers that are responsible for their work, in these circumstances it is vital that paraeducators and those who guide their employment meet often to discuss the efficacy of their work and student needs. Although accounts vary among studies, research indicates that paraeducators are not evaluated appropriately or as often as their positions merit.

**Additional concerns regarding paraeducators.** Beyond the issues mentioned above, researchers have raised questions regarding the appropriateness of the use of paraeducators in general. According to Giangreco et al. (2005), there are a multitude of potential detrimental effects related to the assignment of one-on-one paraeducators to students with disabilities. Some of the negative effects are social in nature such as “separation from classmates” (students with one-on-one paraeducators are often physically separated from the rest of the class) and “interference with peer interactions” (p. 30). Other effects are directly related to education such as “limited access to competent instruction” and “interference with teacher engagement” (p. 30). Similarly, a study out of the United Kingdom (Webster et al., 2010) found a negative relationship between student academic achievement and the amount of paraeducator (referred in the article as teacher assistants) support they receive. The relationship was strongest for students with special needs. The authors speculate that paraeducator inexperience and lack of qualifications were responsible for this relationship. Additionally, researchers analyzed the verbal exchanges between students and teachers, and students and paraeducators. They found that paraeducators focused more on “task completion rather than ensuring that any learning and understanding had

taken place” (p. 328). Additionally, they found that paraeducators at times provided incorrect information and frequently provided students with answers.

Two decades ago, Snodgrass (1991) made an observation that continues to ring true. However effective or successful a teacher aide might appear to be, realistically, classroom instruction...is often being delivered to those students who need the most specialized help by an adult who may be the *least academically prepared* [italics added] to teach, a non certified teacher aide. (p. 5).

According to Giangreco, by assigning one-on-one paraeducators to students with special needs we are in reality assigning the least trained and qualified staff to the students with the “most complex learning characteristics” (Giangreco et al., 2005, p. 29). Additionally, he suggests that mainstreaming a student with disabilities into a general education classroom with the assistance of a one-to-one paraeducator is in reality one of the most restrictive options available (Giangreco, 2010). As a result of IDEIA, students are legally required to be instructed within the least restrictive environment possible. In practice this means that students receiving special education services who are able to receive an appropriate education within a general education classroom should be instructed alongside their general education peers. One-to-one paraeducators are often assigned to students who require physical or academic assistance so that they can attend a general education classroom. However, Giangreco suggested that there are many potential negative effects related one-to-one paraeducator assignment that are often overlooked and that each student’s situation should be considered carefully (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Too often the assignment of a one-on-one paraeducator is the default choice for students (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002).

Giangreco has pioneered instruments and guidelines that help schools identify their overreliance on paraeducators (Giangreco & Broer, 2007). However, before any improvement can be made, district and school administrators must evaluate their current use of paraeducators, a population, which is often overlooked.

### **Principals as Supervisors of Paraeducators**

Principals are the lead administrators working in elementary, junior and senior high schools (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009b). They have many roles and responsibilities within the schools they lead. Specific responsibilities include, leading out in establishing a positive school climate and vision, acting as a model and resource for teachers and other staff, ensuring that effective instructional practices are utilized by teachers, hiring and evaluating staff, generating financial budgets, creating student achievement reports, and observing classrooms (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009b; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

While searching the literature for this review, the following articles were identified that specifically investigated the relationship between paraeducators and principals. Wallace, Stahl, and Johnson (2003) looked closely at paraeducators and principals working in Minnesota schools. According to the paraeducators they queried, principals were the individuals most often responsible for their evaluations and were second most likely to be their supervisors, behind only special educators. Looking closer, only 31% of paraeducators reported that a principal or assistant principal performed their evaluation and 17% reported that a principal or assistant principal was their supervisor. Additionally, only 4% of paraeducators reported that a principal directed their day to day work. This research suggests that a limited number of paraeducators were supervised and evaluated by their principals; however, further investigation is warranted.

Ashbaker and Morgan (2006) provided guidance to administrators in their article *The Role of Administrators in Paraprofessional Supervision to Support Ethnic Minority Students with Special Needs*. As the title implies, this article provides suggestions to administrators on their role in the supervision of paraeducators. Some specific suggestions to administrators include “provide an organized infrastructure for the system to accommodate the employment, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals” and “provide support through availing resources for the preservice training, offering basic training in teamwork, and ensuring that the system of evaluation and rewards is in place to recognize good work” (pp. 18-19). Although the article provides substantial guidance to principals on their involvement with paraeducators, the authors do not provide any data on the relationship between paraeducators and principals in schools today.

As teachers and paraeducators serve in similar capacities, and both work under a school principal, an in-depth look at the current body of literature pertaining to teachers and principals is warranted and may prove insightful. In theory, many of the research findings may be generalizable to paraeducators and other school staff. The following sections will focus on teacher training, hiring, evaluation, and supervision.

**Teacher and paraeducator training.** A major difference between teachers and paraeducators is found in the amount of and type of training they receive. Whereas paraeducators most often rely on their employer for training, public school teachers are required to have advanced training in education before they begin teaching (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a). Teachers throughout the United States must have at least a bachelor's degree and have “have completed an approved teacher training program with a prescribed number of subject and

education credits, as well as supervised practice teaching” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a, Licensure and Certification, para. 2).

Teachers continue to receive training during their employment through professional development activities. According to DuFour (2004), in contrast to a few non-teaching days for professional development, “job-embedded, site-based professional development offers the best venue for educators' ongoing learning” (para. 21). He suggested that effective professional development facilitates collaboration among teachers as they assess student performance, analyze data, and “help each other develop and implement strategies to improve current levels of student learning” (para. 2).

Finally, DuFour suggested that leaders have an important role in facilitating this kind of professional development. They must “create structures that require teachers to work together, and build time for that work into the school day and annual calendar” (DeFour, 2004, para. 13).

**Hiring staff.** According to Hallinger and Heck (1996) a principal’s greatest influence on student achievement comes in the form of “influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning” (p.38). Perhaps the clearest example of this is in the hiring of teachers who work with students on a daily basis. This suggests that hiring qualified and effective teachers is a vitally important principal responsibility. Research suggests that principals are aware of the importance of hiring effective staff (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003).

As many principals play a central role in hiring teachers (Rutledge, Harris, Ingle, 2009), they should be educated in research based hiring strategies (Stronge et al., 2008). Stronge and Hindman (as cited in Stronge et al., 2008) created a protocol known as the Teacher Quality Index (TQI) for hiring teachers. The protocol suggested that “hiring decisions be based on a thorough

analysis of all applicable evidence about the candidate, including review of the applicant's credentials and recommendations, screening and building-based interviews, and performance samples (i.e., teacher demonstration of a sample lesson)"(p. 38). Although not all principals will use the TQI when hiring teachers, it is a prime example of a research based instrument. In general teacher employment decisions should be based on multiple sources of data such as those considered in the TQI.

**Supervision and evaluation.** Nolan and Hoover (2004) suggested that evaluation and supervision are "separate but complimentary functions" (p.6). Teacher evaluation involves judgments of teacher quality and competence; while supervision aims to improve teacher performance (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). Additionally, *The National Association of Elementary School Principals 2010-2011 Platform* states that evaluation should facilitate improvements in teacher and student performance (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2010). There is a blurry line between supervision and evaluation. A 2007 study investigated Canadian teachers' preferred model of supervision. The models of supervision the teachers were able to choose from included "evaluation by school supervisors, school council members, school principals, peers, students, teachers' self-evaluation or no evaluation at all" (Bouchamma, 2007, p. 289). In essence, evaluation can be seen as part of, or a form of, supervision. The bulk of this section will focus on teacher evaluation; however, in many instances the term supervision can be used interchangeably. In reality, both processes share common characteristics, and may overlap each other in practice.

Effective teacher evaluation involves significant amounts of time, a systematic approach, and effort on both the part of the principal and teacher (Evertson & Holley, 1981; Helm, 1997; Peterson, 2000). Peterson (2000) suggested that the "function of teacher evaluation is to seek



out, document, and acknowledge the good teaching that already exists” (p. 4). According to Stronge et al. (2008), “teacher evaluation should never be just a required form that must be filled out every year or so” (p. 66).

Information used to evaluate teachers should be gathered from a variety of sources (Evertson & Holley, 1981; Peterson, 2000). Peterson (2000) recommended obtaining data from the following sources when evaluating teachers: “Student reports, peer reviews of materials, student achievement data, teacher tests, parent reports, documentation of professional activity, systematic observation, administrator report, and other and unique sources” (pp. 93-97). By obtaining data from a variety of sources, the evaluator is able to get a more complete picture of the teacher's efficacy, strengths, and weaknesses.

One method of obtaining information for teacher evaluation of particular importance is the classroom observation. According to Evertson and Holley (1981) classroom observations for teacher evaluative purposes should be performed two to five times with each visit lasting no longer than an hour. By observing a teacher multiple times, the evaluator is able to get a more complete picture of teacher and student performance. The observer should collect data from the observation using “valid instruments” and a “systematic approach” (Evertson & Holley, 1981, p. 101).

An important component of teacher evaluation is the evaluative conference. According to Helm (1997), successful conferences require adequate preparation on the part of the principal. She suggests that adequate preparation includes reviewing the teacher's job description, past evaluative data, and performance information. It also includes providing the teacher with a copy of the evaluation forms for self-appraisal, and asking the teacher to “be prepared to discuss successes, unmet challenges, what interferes with his or her best performance, and what the

teacher or school system can do to help the teacher achieve his or her goals” (p. 254). During the conference, both teacher and principal should participate actively, past performance should be reviewed, strengths and weakness should be discussed, and appropriate goals should be made (Helm, 1997). Finally, Helm's stated that evaluative conferences should be a part of an “ongoing supervisory [systems] that [approximate] the coaching function, with regular, immediate, and specific feedback” (p. 266).

The recommendations and best practices discussed above pertain specifically to teachers; however, because of similar roles and responsibilities, in many cases they can be generalized to paraeducators as well. Thus, in review, it is important for principals to hire qualified and effective staff, both paraeducators and teachers. When evaluating all employees for hire, principals should use research based strategies and collect data from a multitude of sources. After they are hired, teachers and paraeducators need continual supervision and evaluation. Evaluation and supervision should not only help staff increase in efficacy, but should focus on student achievement. Principals should consider multiple sources of data when evaluating teachers and paraeducators. Classroom observation is an important source of data and typically more than one visit is required to get an accurate depiction of student and teacher performance. This is also true for paraeducators. Teachers and paraeducators alike should play an active role in the evaluation and supervision processes by gathering data, reflecting on their work and making goals with the principal (Nolan & Hoover, 2004; Peterson, 2000).

**Assistant/vice principals.** In addition to the principal, schools may also function with one or more assistant principals (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009b). Although their specific roles vary from school to school, in general assistant principals are “considered partners in the administrative team,” and they “share administrative responsibilities such as staff evaluation,

supervision of curriculum, and discipline with the principal” (Williams, 1995, p. 75). As administrative partners, the responsibilities pertaining to hiring, training, supervising, and evaluating paraeducators may be handled jointly or separately with the assistant or head principal maintaining primary responsibility.

### **Conclusion**

There has been an increase in the use of paraeducators within elementary and secondary educational settings. Although the benefit of paraeducator use may be common sense (Giangreco et al., 2005), research indicates that these individuals are often inadequately trained, supervised, and evaluated. Little is known about the relationship principals have with paraeducators. Principals play an active role in the hiring, supervision, training, and evaluation of teachers. As teachers and paraeducators have similar roles within schools, logically, one would assume that principals play a similar role in paraeducator supervision, evaluation, training, and hiring. The purpose of the current exploratory and descriptive study is to investigate the level of interaction and involvement principals have with the paraeducators in their schools.

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## Appendix B

### Survey of Current Administrators' Practices Relative to Paraeducators

1. What is your current administrative title? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many years have you worked in administration? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many paraeducators do you currently have in your school? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

Paraeducator evaluation involves the accurate appraisal of the paraeducators effectiveness in carrying out duties and responsibilities, including “strengths and areas for development, followed by feedback, coaching, support and opportunities for professional development.”\*

Paraeducator = paid employee also called teacher aide, teaching assistant, tech

	Title 1	Special Ed.	Other:
Do you <b>hire</b> the paraeducator?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Does your <u>district</u> have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Does your <u>school</u> have written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators in your school policy manual?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Do you observe paraeducators for evaluative purposes?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Do you hold evaluative conferences with paraeducators?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Are you responsible for rating paraeducator performance?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Is paraeducator professional development directly linked to the components/ criteria of the evaluation process?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No

3. As the administrator of the school, are there any specific areas where you feel you would benefit from more support and/or tools in dealing with paraeducators? Yes / No If yes, please use the space provided to elaborate on your answer.

\*Definition adapted from Teacher Evaluation: A conceptual framework and examples of country practices by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/16/24/44568106.pdf>