BEST PRACTICES FOR THE USE AND TRAINING OF PARAPROFESSIONALS

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BEST PRACTICES FOR THE USE AND TRAINING OF PARAPROFESSIONALS

A Project

by

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Abstract

of

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE USE AND TRAINING OF PARAPROFESSIONALS

by

Natalie Zehnder

Over the last decade, the use of paraprofessionals to provide special education delivery has greatly increased. Despite this fact, very little research has been performed to determine whether this is an effective manner for service provision. Research to complete the literature review was conducted by searching the databases Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and PsychArticles for journal articles to identify how paraprofessionals are currently used, how the law describes their appropriate use, and what effects their use for the provision of special education service delivery has on student outcomes. A review of the literature found that although there are general guidelines for paraprofessional use, no researched standards of practice exist for the use and training of paraprofessionals. The professional training included in this project was developed to (a) inform school sites and/or districts of best practices, (b) lead them
through the process of examining their use and training of paraprofessionals, and (c) help them work toward increasing their use of best practices.

Dr. Catherine Christo

Committee Chair

April 16, 2009

Date
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I would like to thank and acknowledge the following people: Dr. Catherine Christo for her help and patience as my advisor and Aaron Christensen for talking through the presentation with me and providing suggestions and encouragement.
DEDICATION

To my husband and sons

Thank you for your patience and understanding
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Paraeducators have been used as aides for students with disabilities for at least 200 years (French, 2003). Paraeducators are used as translators and interpreters, to ease the flow of communication between the school and home community, and to perform secretarial duties as well as teaching duties for general and special education students. Special education programs are the single largest employer of paraprofessionals. From 1993-2001 there has been a 48% average increase nationally in their employment by school districts. Although the actual cause of this increase has not been adequately determined, it is theorized that it is in part due to lack of trained professionals in special education (French, 2003). Paraeducators provide small group instruction, individual instruction, and sometimes whole group instruction (Office of Special Education Programs, 2001a). In most recent years, it has been determined that there are several potential problems with the use of paraeducators to provide special education services. These problems include:

1. Educators are unsure how to use them most effectively.
2. There is no standardized practice for their use.
3. Current uses of paraprofessionals are not demonstrated to help students.
4. The least trained personnel are often working with most challenging students (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).
A balanced approach to the use of paraprofessionals that provides appropriate special education service delivery within the parameters defined by the legal concepts of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) has not been defined by law as of yet. What will be the most effective? How are services delivered in such a way as to prevent encroaching on Least Restrictive Environment? How can the personnel available be best utilized for the good of the students served? As applied to the use of paraprofessionals, there is currently no literature that suggests a definitive answer to these questions. This project describes and evaluates how paraeducators are trained and used in special education settings and concludes with a PowerPoint presentation that outlines best practices for their training and use.

Statement of the Research Problem

The goal of this project is to compose a PowerPoint presentation that describes best practices for the use and training of paraprofessionals working with students receiving their services. The PowerPoint presentation is geared toward school psychologists, special education teachers, and administrators: those personnel most likely to be involved in determining which students, classrooms, and/or settings are to be served by the use of a paraprofessional. The presentation is intended to be used to inform special education personnel regarding best practices to help standardize paraprofessional use and training and in doing so, promote positive student outcomes. Additionally, it will help to answer the following questions: what are the laws regarding the use and training of paraprofessionals, how can school districts guarantee paraprofessionals are qualified to do what is asked of them, where are paraprofessionals used most effectively, and most
importantly, how does the use of paraprofessionals ensure the best outcomes for students?

Theoretical Framework

In the provision of service delivery, educators must adhere to the concept that the goal for any student is for him/her to learn, that educators are charged to provide tools that help students learn, and in the provision of such, not to hinder the students’ individual motivation to learn while encouraging independence. Ultimately, students must learn to function independently to the highest degree possible. Frattura and Capper (2006) describe this concept as the “least enabling” environment for students. This framework works in conjunction with the assumption that well-trained people are better able to provide services to students than less well-trained. According to Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman (1999), “[E]ducational effectiveness depends on a variety of factors such as the purpose of the assignment, the outcomes sought, and the skills of the paraprofessional and other team members” (p. 284). Additionally, it is assumed that providing too much “help” in terms of paraprofessional assistance may be a violation of the concept of least restrictive environment (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999).

Definition of Terms

Except where noted, the definitions for the following terms are from the IRIS online dictionary ( ).

Paraprofessional: in the most literal sense, “an individual trained to assist a professional”. In the context of this document, an individual used to provide services to a
special education student. The term is used interchangeably with paraeducator or instructional/classroom aide in this context as well as in practice.

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** for students with disabilities, provides specialized instruction and related services that allow access to the general curriculum and from which the child receives educational benefit at public expense (Yell, 2006).

**Full inclusion:** an interpretation of the least restrictive environment concept that students should receive most (if not all) their instruction in the general education classroom.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** a written program that describes in detail the necessary accommodations, modifications, and related services necessary to provide a student appropriate learning opportunities.

**Least restrictive environment (LRE):** One of the principals outlined in IDEA that students with disabilities be educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible.

**Special Education:** Individualized education for children and youth with exceptional learning needs.

**Service Delivery:** any number of means through which special education services are provided to students with disabilities.

### Justification

School Psychologists, special educators, and administrators are part of the team, usually the IEP team, that makes decisions regarding where paraprofessionals are placed, with which students, with which teachers, and in which settings. In addition, with the
movement toward placing more students in full inclusion settings, there is often pressure from both teachers and parents to provide one-to-one paraprofessional assistance for students (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Giangreco, Smith, & Pinckney, 2006). These factors require that IEP team members and others involved in the hiring and placement of paraprofessionals be educated on law and best practices. Furthermore, as decision makers, it is incumbent upon the IEP team to be proactive in ensuring adequate training and appropriate use of paraprofessionals. The courts have ruled that a paraprofessional may be necessary in order to meet the provision of FAPE for a student as well as that paraprofessionals must have the appropriate training to meet the student’s needs (Katsiyannis, Hodge, & Lanford, 2000). Decision makers such as IEP teams must be prepared to provide an appropriately placed, qualified paraprofessional in those instances as in all others.

Limitations

This project, as with any other, has limitations. It pertains only to those paraprofessionals who are used in general or special education settings for the delivery of special education and related services. With the exception of one article reviewed (Ghere & York-Barr, 2003), all studies were primarily conducted in one area of the country, generally the Northeast. It concludes with a PowerPoint presentation; however, the presentation was not evaluated for use with school districts. It is a combination of legal requirements and techniques presented in the literature of the last decade.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Recent studies have shown that the use of paraprofessionals for special education service delivery has greatly increased over the last decade (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002). Various sources have tried to quantify the exact number of paraprofessionals working with special education students, but until the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, no federal legislation used the term “paraprofessional” to apply to special education (Ghere & York-Barr, 2003). At that time, it was estimated that approximately 500,000 paraprofessionals were employed in school systems nationally, but due to the intermittent collection of data by states, and no national data base, there is no actual number to document how great the increase has been for special education in particular (French, 2003). The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), as of 2000, estimates the number to be closer to 250,000 (OSEP, 2001b). The increase has been attributed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the concept of full inclusion, teachers’ and parents’ beliefs that full inclusion cannot be done well without the use of a paraprofessional, and the lack of qualified special education teachers.

Along with the lack of information describing the actual number of paraprofessionals employed in special education, is the number employed for various types of work: Who is employed where? This information is necessary in terms of understanding who is providing services to the neediest of students (Giangreco et al., 1997). As previously mentioned, no legal description of paraprofessional was given until
IDEA, including appropriate job responsibilities, job training, or job supervision for paraprofessionals. School districts were left on their own to determine how paraprofessionals could be used to benefit students. The consequences of this lack of direction have had a huge impact on how paraprofessionals are used even today.

**Current Status**

Paraprofessionals are used to provide a variety of services within the context of special education. In addition, paraprofessionals are used to provide services for students with a variety of disabilities, including one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, as well as provide whole group instruction (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005). In the course of their duties, they may be required to make lesson plans that carry out the intentions of the IEP, they may provide medical services, and/or they may be asked to perform duties for which they are not adequately trained. Additionally, they may be inadequately supervised for those very same duties. Potential consequences of using paraprofessionals for special education service delivery include the following: the least trained personnel provide most of the instruction to students with the greatest learning challenges, it is not always clear between paraprofessionals and the educators they work with exactly what it is appropriate for them to do, and there is little data to support or refute the efficacy of using paraprofessionals for special education service delivery. In addition, there is data that suggest some aspects of using paraprofessionals can be detrimental to student outcomes (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

Another area of concern regarding the use of paraprofessionals is supervision. Special educators report that they are often inadequately trained to supervise
paraprofessionals. Moreover, paraprofessionals are often used to fully include students with special education needs in general education classrooms. An OSEP study from 2001 found that of general education teachers trained within the past 6 years, only half had been trained to modify curriculum for special needs students, and approximately two-thirds had learned behavior management strategies specific to those same students; none had been trained in the supervision of paraprofessionals.

**Laws and Regulations**

Case law has consistently supported the use of paraprofessionals to provide FAPE (Etscheidt, 2005; Katsiyannis et al., 2000). Conversely, rulings by both Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and OSEP have found in favor of school districts when paraprofessionals were requested by parents for reasons other than the provision of FAPE. Case law has also supported training for paraprofessionals that corresponds to the tasks they are asked to perform. In a review of rulings by the OCR, OSEP, and hearing officers, Katsiyannis et al., report support for the training of paraprofessionals appropriate to the tasks they were required to perform with students, including medical. Furthermore, those who lack sufficient training must be supervised by certified special education personnel. Additionally, the same case law review noted that rulings have favored school districts/educational agencies when it comes to personnel matters. In determining who should be placed with students, OSEP and OCR found that hiring and placement of paraprofessionals is an administrative decision, and not a judicial one. During expulsion or suspension, paraprofessional services that are required by an IEP must be delivered.
Just as case law has affected what is considered to be legally appropriate for paraprofessionals, changes in IDEA have led to changes in what paraprofessionals do and the level of training they need in order to perform these duties. IDEA amendments of 1997 require that states develop plans to ensure that those professionals, including paraprofessionals, working with students be adequately trained in the skills and knowledge required for their job (Katsiyannis et al., 2000). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) spells out that to be considered “highly qualified” and basically, employable, paraprofessionals must be provided training. School districts are responsible to provide that training.

*Directions for Best Practices*

There are guidelines put forth by IDEA and NCLB as well as a handful of studies that suggest directions for best practices for use and training of paraprofessionals. Currently, however, there are no specifically agreed upon models that describe such.

In determining how best to use and train paraprofessionals, one must understand the factors involved. Several themes regarding the use of paraprofessionals for special education service delivery have been described in the literature. Those include:

1. Numbers of paraprofessionals have increased (French, 2003; Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

2. Paraprofessionals may or may not be well-trained (Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

3. Paraprofessionals may be well-trained by NCLB definition, but they are still not appropriately trained for the jobs they are being asked to do (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Giangreco & Broer, 2005).
4. No research exists to show a definitive improvement in student outcomes with the use of a paraprofessional (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

5. No standardization exists in terms of training, usage, or supervision (Trautman, 2004a).

In attempting to address these issues, the literature review will describe current uses of paraprofessionals, including perceived beneficial and detrimental practices, the law as it relates to training and usage of paraprofessionals, as well as suggestions for the uses of paraprofessionals with specific populations of students with disabilities.

Who Are Paraprofessionals?

Various studies have found differing numbers of paraprofessionals employed for roughly the same dates. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education for the school year 2003-2004, there were over 300,000 paraprofessionals working nationally with special education students (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). “The typical special education paraprofessional is a 44-year-old female who works in a regular elementary or secondary school. She has 6.5 years of experience in special education and 7.9 as a paraprofessional overall” (OSEP, 2001b). The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) collected data to determine the current usage and demographics of special education paraprofessionals. That study found that special education paraprofessionals were more likely than other paraprofessionals to work fulltime. The average special education paraprofessional works in five different classes per week and serves 21 students, 15 of whom have disabilities. Of all schools in districts that hired instructional paraprofessionals, 93% required these staff to have a high school
diploma or the equivalent, 39% required at least 2 years of college, 18% required an associate’s or higher degree, and 37% required the passage of a state or local test. A high school diploma or its equivalent was used but not required by 5% of schools. French (1999) found that paraprofessionals are often women from the community, and that their ethnicities and backgrounds often match that of the schools in which they work better than that of the teachers’.

Common Practice

Paraprofessionals are used for a variety of purposes, and their job descriptions vary depending upon who defines them. Paraprofessionals find they are often asked to make program decisions for the students they serve as well as develop plans for instruction (French, 1999). Special educators describe their use of paraprofessionals as assistants to students or as assistants to themselves, but definitely people they rely on daily to make decisions regarding students (French, 1998). NCLB states that paraprofessionals are to work alongside credentialed special education professionals and are not allowed to provide new instruction (United States Department of Education, 2004). Obviously, these three descriptions are not in complete agreement.

How, then, to define paraprofessionals’ usage? Current practice for the use of special education paraprofessionals is usually one of two types: One-to-one paraprofessional with student, or program/classroom paraprofessional. The one-to-one paraprofessional works with one student who has disabilities, generally for the entire day. The classroom paraprofessional works with several students in the same classroom.
According to French (1999):

The primary reasons paraeducators are employed in special education are to increase the instructional quality and time for students with disabilities and to assure their safety. A paraeducator's presence permits a more timely, compassionate response to student needs; provides differentiated strengths to the team; and allows greater flexibility in service delivery. In schools that use inclusionary practices, the teachers, paraeducators, and parents agree that the paraeducator makes inclusion feasible. Each group of people has independently declared: "Without the paraeducator, inclusion would not be possible" (p. 66).

Paraeducators have a variety of duties, most of which involve providing direct instruction to the students whom they serve (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Daniels & McBride, 2001). Additionally, paraprofessionals are increasingly being asked to perform “custodial duties”, duties such as tube feedings, diaper changing, and positioning of non-ambulatory students (Carroll, 2001). Giangreco and Doyle found that paraprofessionals believed their role to include keeping the students in their charge from being a “bother” to the teacher, to bear the primary responsibility for their students’ success, and to be the “expert” on the student in regards to performance and any issues related to the disability. Oftentimes paraprofessionals found themselves in situations where decisions regarding students needed to be made and waiting for the responsible teacher was not possible.

Paraprofessionals have also served as liaisons to parents. They have assisted with the negotiation and translation of information presented to parents by professionals from different disciplines (Marks, Schrader, & Levine 1999); they have bridged the gaps in
trust and communication that sometimes exist among parents, teachers, the school, and the community. Training is primarily “on-the-job”, with supervising special education teachers providing the majority of instruction, as well as the decision-making regarding appropriate subject matter for training (Carroll, 2001; Katsiyannis et al., 2000).

Value of Paraprofessionals

Both special education teachers and parents describe the services provided by paraprofessionals as valuable. Paraprofessionals have been found to be particularly valued by the parents of students who have disabilities. Parents describe them as heroes, note that they help bridge the gap in communication between the school and home, and find them to be kind, warm, and caring people. General education teachers depict paraprofessionals as dedicated people who care about the work they do. They are believed to be committed and involved as well as flexible and creative (French, 1999).

Paraprofessionals have found their own worth in the educational setting, describing themselves as creative, flexible, and open to new experiences. Most report they are satisfied with their jobs and believe what they do is important. They appreciate the flexibility that working in a school provides (French, 1999).

Many benefits can result from the employment of paraprofessionals in school settings. These benefits include:

1. Increased availability of positive adult role models for students.
2. Expanded student learning opportunities.
3. Increased availability of individual and small-group instruction.
4. Additional time for professionals to plan, provide instruction and related services, and evaluate program outcomes (French, 1999; Daniels & McBride, 2001).

5. Increased on-task student behaviors in the classroom (Daniels & McBride, 2001).


French (2003) describes a study from Scotland where 4400 classroom assistants were hired between 2000 and 2001. The goal was to increase adult to student ratios for special and general education students. They found increases in active versus passive learning, in student-teacher engagement, as well as teacher expectations for all students’ achievement. Perceptions of classroom aides were positive; they were seen as “helpers” and students enjoyed working with them.

**Student Perceptions of Paraprofessionals**

One of the fundamental questions to ask when considering the use of paraprofessionals is how do they affect the students with whom they work? The literature shows that results are mixed. Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco (2005) conducted interviews with sixteen students with intellectual disability to look at the issue. The students in this study were assigned one-on-one paraprofessionals. Although the authors found these descriptions to be a reason for concern, the students involved did not always see it the same way. The researchers found that the student responses regarding how they
saw the paraprofessionals fell into four categories: mother, protector, friend, and teacher. Students describing positive aspects of the relationships with their paraprofessional noted that it was easier to relate to a paraprofessional of the same gender and to one of a similar age. Paraprofessionals often filled a friendship role when students felt isolated because of their disability. In addition, some students reported that paraprofessionals were there to intervene when the student(s) felt bullied. Lastly, paraprofessionals were seen as students' primary teachers, from whom they learned the most. The study found that participants felt most proud when their paraprofessionals allowed them to work on their own, when they felt “released” from the paraprofessionals’ oversight. They also felt that it was necessary at times to have a paraprofessional’s support for controlling their own behavior, and demonstrated appreciation for that. The researchers also discussed how these same four categories carried stigma or negative connotations for the students. Those perceptions are elaborated upon within the “Concerns associated with the use of paraprofessionals” section.

Parent Perceptions of Paraprofessionals

In their role as parents and as IEP team members, parents have their own understanding and appreciation for the paraprofessionals who work with their children. Gessler-Werts, Harris, Young-Tillery, and Roark (2004) found that 75% of those surveyed in their study of parents' perceptions of paraprofessionals felt positively about the paraprofessional’s involvement in the classroom. Parents of children who had a one-on-one aide or a classroom paraprofessional were interviewed to explore parents’ perceptions regarding paraprofessionals’ interactions with their children. As with the
students' perceptions of the paraprofessionals, results were mixed. Although many of the parents had positive perceptions of the paraprofessional working with their child, a few had negative perceptions, and a few had no perceptions. Parents’ positive perceptions of paraprofessionals included the extra help their children received as well as the ability for their child to be successfully included within a general education classroom. Some parents noted that communication between home and school was improved due to the paraprofessional’s efforts (Gessler-Werts et al., 2004; Chopra et al., 2004). The tendency for parents to communicate through paraprofessionals is not unusual (French & Chopra, 1999) and, according to Gessler-Werts et al., is one of the characteristics of paraprofessionals appreciated most by parents.

Unfortunately, despite the benefits described by many for the use of paraprofessionals, there continue to be concerns. Some studies have shown a detrimental effect for the use of paraprofessionals, and no studies have shown definitively that student outcomes are improved (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

Concerns Associated with the Use of Paraprofessionals

Giangreco and others describe some of the potential pitfalls associated with the use of one-to-one paraprofessionals for students with disabilities (Giangreco et al., 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; French, 2003). Concerns such as the least trained personnel teaching students with the greatest learning needs, the inadvertent detrimental effects for students who have paraprofessionals, the decrease in teacher engagement with students who have paraprofessionals, and that the use of paraprofessional supports may delay attention to needed changes in schools have been reported.
Least Trained Professionals Work with the Most Challenging Students

Several articles mentioned lack of training for paraprofessionals as problematic (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Devlin, 2005; Giangreco et al., 2005). However, few offered solutions or data regarding why, exactly, lack of training was important. Most often the argument offered was one of common sense. Those who are minimally trained in the provision of instruction to students with disabilities and often, minimally paid, are not likely to be providing adequate or best practice level services. A few paraprofessionals have refused to perform certain duties, stating that particular subject areas are not within their job duties. Paraprofessionals may need skills in any academic area, from algebra to independent living skills, as they are asked to provide these types of instruction (Giangreco et al., 2002). Riggs and Mueller (2001) found that paraprofessionals planned instruction for students on a regular basis, regardless of training. Lack of training is significant because of the responsibilities often given to paraprofessionals. They report frequently having to make decisions regarding students for which they are unsupported and unprepared (Giangreco et al., 1997).

Inadvertent Detrimental Effects for Students When Using Paraprofessionals

Giangreco et al., (2005) list a number of potential detrimental effects specifically when paraprofessionals are used to provide one-on-one support for students. Students may be separated from their classmates, may feel stigmatized, may have limited access to the teacher, and may act out due their dislike of having a paraprofessional assigned. In a study of students with multiple disabilities, paraprofessional proximity was found to interfere with peer relationships, teacher engagement and appropriate instruction, as well
as lead to loss of gender identity, loss of personal control, and dependence on adults (Giangreco et al., 1997).

Both parents and students have questioned how paraprofessionals are used to provide support. Students have described experiences where they felt "mothered" inappropriately, belittled, and/or a feeling of being "different" because of the assignment of a paraprofessional to meet their needs (Giangreco et al., 1997). Parents have questioned whether paraprofessionals needed to be with their children for every activity, whether paraprofessionals are adequately trained, and whether their children were being trained to be overly dependent on an adult (Gessler-Werts et al., 2004).

Less Teacher Engagement

Giangreco and Doyle (2002) define teacher engagement as continued involvement in a student's program and planning as well as on-going instruction with the student. Studies suggest that teacher involvement is a key factor in ensuring an appropriate program for special education students. Teacher engagement is also associated with teachers' knowledge regarding their students' progress, and teacher engagement is associated with better student outcomes overall. Teachers who were found to be more engaged took responsibility for the learning of all their students, not just those without disabilities (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Devlin, 2005). Teachers were more engaged with students when the paraprofessional was program-based or classroom based rather than student assigned. Giangreco and Doyle (2002) also found that teacher engagement was associated with paraprofessional supervision. Those teachers who were less engaged were less likely to provide adequate supervision for the paraprofessional(s) assigned to
the class/student(s). Devlin found that teacher engagement levels improved with training that included instruction in teamwork, clear goals, and data collection.

**High Paraprofessional Turnover**

As training has been identified as one of the significant concerns in the use of paraprofessionals to provide special education services, the ability to retain well-trained paraprofessionals is vital. Ghere and York-Barr (2007) found that several factors were relevant to high turnover rate among special education paraprofessionals; among them low pay, lack of respect, and stress related to high levels of responsibility without the requisite training. Additionally, staff, programs, and students were greatly impacted by turnover as lack of paraprofessionals meant rearranging schedules, re-prioritizing students' needs (sometimes to the detriment of those students whose needs were not health-related), and additional training time for new employees.

**Needed Attention to Special Education Service Delivery May Be Delayed**

Giangreco and colleagues (2006) note that overreliance on paraprofessionals likely masks sizeable special education caseloads, inadequate supervision of paraprofessional use, and insufficient teacher engagement. They also note that paraprofessionals have become "the way" to provide service delivery to special education students instead of just "a way" to deliver services. Although providing support for students and teachers by the use of paraprofessionals may be well-meaning, it "should not be confused with good educational practices" (Giangreco et al., 2005). They report that keeping caseloads "just manageable" may divert attention from needed changes in the special education delivery system overall.
Laws Related to Paraprofessional Use and Training

Laws regarding paraprofessionals are limited. The term paraprofessional as applied to the special education setting was first referenced in IDEA in 1997. IDEA supports the use of paraprofessionals when required to provide Free Appropriate Public Education for students with disabilities. It, however, does not spell out exactly how paraprofessionals should do so. Likewise, case law has supported the use of paraprofessionals in the same manner. Other laws related to the use of paraprofessionals are outlined in NCLB.

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*

*Duties of paraprofessionals.* The latest version of IDEA, as adopted in 2003, has general requirements for paraprofessionals. No specifics regarding which duties are appropriate for paraprofessionals are outlined. If they have adequate supervision, paraprofessionals can be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services (Carroll, 2001; Appl, 2006).

*Training of paraprofessionals.* The rules and regulations for determining training and qualifications for paraprofessionals are relegated to the states. IDEA requires states to set standards for appropriate preparation and training of paraprofessionals to ensure that paraprofessionals have the content knowledge and skills to serve students with disabilities. It also states that paraprofessionals shall not work under a provisional or temporary or emergency certification or licensure (Carroll, 2001; Snyder, 2003).
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Duties of paraprofessionals. First adopted/outlined in 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was designed to improve student outcomes by improving teacher quality. NCLB requires that states and school districts address the employment, preparation, and assessment of paraprofessionals. They must also define the specific duties that may be performed by paraprofessionals and how supervision of paraprofessionals will transpire. According to NCLB, paraprofessionals may be expected to:

1. Provide tutoring, but only at times when students are not receiving direct instruction from teachers.
2. Organize instructional materials.
3. Provide computer lab, library, or media center support.
4. Conduct parental involvement activities.
5. Act as a translator.

NCLB also explicitly states that paraprofessionals must work under the direct supervision of a qualified teacher. The qualified teacher must prepare lessons and all instructional support activities as well as conduct any assessments required for students involved with a paraprofessional. In addition, the paraprofessional is to work closely with the teacher in terms of lesson preparation, but also in terms of proximity.

Training and qualifications for paraprofessionals. According to the California State Department of Education, NCLB requires that each paraprofessional have at least
two years of education beyond high school, have obtained an associate’s degree, or pass a state exam that demonstrates knowledge of techniques for the instruction of reading, writing, and mathematics. The California State Board of Education has defined “two years of study” as 48 semester units, and stipulates that localities select their own assessments to qualify paraprofessionals as well as determine the type of course work that meets the criteria for qualification. In addition to meeting the above requirements, NCLB requires that any paraprofessional engaged in an instructional capacity at a school receiving Title 1, Part A funds have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent. Exemptions to NCLB requirements apply to those paraprofessionals not providing the above services and/or are not employed at schools receiving Title 1, Part A funds (California Department of Education, n.d.).

Case Law

Duties of paraprofessionals. Case law has consistently supported the use of paraprofessionals to provide FAPE to students with disabilities (Etsheidt, 2005; Katsiyannis et al., 2000). Consequently, the major factors related to case law and the provision of paraprofessional services relate to the provision of FAPE. Paraprofessionals are to provide supplemental supports and are to be closely monitored by a certified special education teacher while doing so. Duty to maintain student safety has been found to be within the purview of paraprofessionals: Appropriately trained paraprofessionals have been required to suction tracheotomy tubes, accompany students to and from school, and provide medications under the supervision of a qualified nurse. Paraprofessionals
may not serve as the sole implementer or evaluator of a student’s program; responsibility lies with the IEP team and/or special education teacher (Etscheidt, 2005).

*Training and qualifications for paraprofessional.* Decisions regarding which paraprofessionals should be used with which students have consistently favored the school district, stating that the hiring and training of paraprofessionals is an administrative decision. However, decisions have also supported the appropriate training and supervision of paraprofessionals, arguing that training appropriate to the services provided must be addressed by school districts, and not doing so may be a restriction/violation of a student’s right to FAPE. The training may be provided by a student’s previous paraprofessional, by the school district, or by an outside agency, but it must directly pertain to the services required by the student (or to the student’s needs and disability). Several cases also supported training in areas often thought of as medically-based. In a specific case, Denver paraprofessionals filed a grievance over the requirement that they provide services they defined as medical services. It resulted in a change of practice for nurses working in school settings. Because of the ruling, nurses in Colorado bear the same responsibilities in terms of the supervision and training of paraprofessionals as special education teachers. They are to perform training that is adequate to meet paraprofessionals’ needs to perform school health services. Additionally, they are to provide supervision for paraprofessionals as well as be the primary evaluators of student progress (Etscheidt, 2005). Those needs such as medication administration, tracheotomy tube suctioning, seizure management, and resuscitation were seen by hearing officers and/or judges as necessary to the provision of
FAPE, capable of being performed by trained personnel as opposed to medical personnel, and thus defined as related services, requiring adequate training for paraprofessionals (French, 2003). If specific credentials or qualifications are required for a particular paraprofessional to work with a student, those credentials must be specified within the IEP. Otherwise, districts may make the determination of what constitutes adequately qualified (Etscheidt, 2005).

Description of Best Practices for Use and Training

Many recommendations have been made in terms of improving paraprofessionals' effectiveness. French (2003) recommends three changes.

1. Define paraprofessionals' roles and responsibilities.
2. Assure appropriate supervision by qualified professionals.
3. Provide appropriate training.

Although there were no studies found that determined implementing these three strategies would actually improve paraprofessional quality and effectiveness, nor was literature found that corroborated they would improve student outcomes, other researchers have come to similar conclusions (Ghere and York-Barr, 2003; Riggs, 2001). French (2002), in a separate work, discusses ways to maximize the use of paraprofessionals, suggesting that job descriptions specific to each paraprofessional be used. Furthermore, she suggests supervisors should communicate their particular work style and provide specific work plans for students as well as provide adequate supervision and training.
Appropriate Training

A study by Ghere and York-Barr (2003) estimated that depending upon a paraprofessional’s baseline knowledge, the intensity of support she might be expected to deliver, and the variety of environments she might be expected to work in, developing adequate skills for effectiveness could take between 1-12 months. Where NCLB and IDEA provide a general framework for the training of paraprofessionals, entities concerned with the use of paraprofessionals, such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), have developed a detailed set of qualifications to determine proper training. For example, CEC developed a core of knowledge and skill standards for paraprofessionals that addresses eight domains considered essential for competency. The eight domains include the philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of special education; characteristics of learners; assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation; instructional content and practice; supporting the teaching and learning environment, managing student behavior and social interaction skills; communication and collaborative partnerships; and professionalism and ethical practices (CEC, 2000). These areas are considered to be areas of “core competency” by CEC.

Parsons and Reid (1999) described successful characteristics of staff training programs as they pertain to the training of paraprofessionals. They report that research supports the use of efficiency in training delivery, focus on performance based skills, and support from staff in training and the training program.

Oftentimes paraprofessionals’ orientation to a new setting or student involves a brief introduction to the students and teachers. The expectation is that the
paraprofessional will be ready to go and effective. However, given the level of responsibility entrusted to paraprofessionals, this is hardly sufficient. Carroll (2001) suggests that training begin with the interview process. She recommends beginning with a basic school orientation that includes a review of teacher and school policies, includes a map and bell schedules, a full documentation of students’ IEP goals, and monthly meetings to discuss student needs and progress. According to Cobb (2007), good training begins with a needs assessment, continues with training to address needs, and follows up with consultation.

Ghere and York-Barr (2003), in a study of inclusive special education programs, outline three particularly appropriate environments in which to deliver training for paraprofessionals: job-embedded training, building level training, and district level training. Job-embedded training occurs at the school site and is delivered by special education teachers to the paraprofessionals with whom they work. In job-embedded training, special education teachers provide daily communication with paraprofessionals, training within the context of instruction to students, and regular meetings focused on student and instructional issues. Building level training brings together several paraprofessionals at a site to provide instruction in a common-need area. District level training involves the provision of training in an identified area of need for paraprofessionals across the district. As this study was designed to evaluate how paraprofessionals are employed and assigned in inclusive settings, no data was provided as to the effectiveness of the training approach.
Training for paraprofessionals and their use are intricately entwined. One of the factors found to affect paraprofessionals’ need for and perception of training was their working conditions. Paraprofessionals have made their own suggestions for what constitutes the best training and working conditions. They want to be viewed as members of a team that works toward the goal of meeting students’ needs, they want well-defined expectations in terms of responsibility to students, they want recognition of their valuable experiences, and they want teachers to accept responsibility for all students. Conversely, they do not want teachers to assume that paraprofessionals will bear the sole responsibility for those students who receive special education (Riggs, 2004).

Retention is an important aspect of training, as those paraprofessionals who are retained are by definition more experienced, and presumably, better trained. Paraprofessionals have also described how best to enhance satisfaction with their jobs such as gaining respect from their colleagues, obtaining on-going training and appropriate supervision, and receiving appropriate orientation regarding their districts’ and sites’ procedures and policies (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

Paraprofessional training may be paid for by the use of Title I and Title II funds from NCLB, as well as grants from OSEP, and/or private agencies (French, 2003). Funding from these sources does not preclude the use of general funds to employ or train paraprofessionals should a district choose to use them.
Appropriate Use

In determining the best practices for use of paraprofessionals, one must consider several factors. First, the law is specific in regard to how paraprofessionals are not to be used. NCLB states that paraprofessionals are not to be used to introduce new skills or to introduce new concepts. They are specifically for the use of student support (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). These guidelines apply to all paraprofessionals who provide instructional support in schools receiving Title I funds for the support of special and general education students.

Other factors are related to common sense and ethics. Giangreco and Doyle (2002) suggest one simple question to employ before considering assignment of a paraprofessional to a student, “Would it be okay if the student didn’t have a disability?” Mueller and Murphy (2001) outline a three-step process for IEP teams to use. It begins with a student needs checklist, proceeds to a matrix outlining circumstances in which the student needs assistance, and concludes with a plan for the implementation of paraprofessional support. The goals of this process are to provide appropriate support for the student while increasing independence and social acceptance. Beyond considering the students’ needs and how s/he will benefit from a paraprofessional, the IEP team must consider what kinds of training and experience the paraprofessional has had. Are they commensurate with the needs of the student? How will the paraprofessional work with the teacher/team and visa versa? Some researchers have suggested that the problem with the use of paraprofessionals may not only lie in their training, but in their overuse. Giangreco et al. (2005) suggest that IEP teams look to alternate types of supports, such as
more teacher engagement, peer support, and/or a move from one-to-one support to classroom-based support. Giangreco and Broer (2007) developed a 10-step screening tool to help schools and districts determine whether they rely on paraprofessionals too heavily. Asking questions beginning with the phrase, "You know there is a problem when....", Giangreco and Broer not only attempt to help schools identify if there is an overreliance on paraprofessionals, but also to identify in which of four areas schools should focus: student isolation within the classroom, inappropriate paraprofessional autonomy, lack of teacher engagement, and/or inappropriate resource allocation. Teams may then begin discussions that address their most immediate needs first. Giangreco reported that the 46 schools that used this system found an increase in overall satisfaction with paraprofessional service delivery as well as a sense that students were performing better.

One of the more important factors to consider when using paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities is appropriate supervision. The special education teacher who works most closely with the paraprofessional is usually the primary provider of supervision. The special educator’s role in supervision includes complete preparation of student instructional plans, close work with the paraprofessional in the implementation of those plans, and maintaining responsibility for the evaluation and assessment of students (Trautman, 2004a). In addition, supervision requires not only determining student needs, but determining the needs of paraprofessionals in order to provide opportunities for continued training. Yearly evaluations of paraprofessionals are often required by school districts; these, along with observations and discussion, can provide
invaluable information regarding the training needs of paraprofessionals (Carroll, 2001; Riggs, 2001). In order for paraprofessionals to carry out their roles effectively, special education teachers must provide the necessary guidance.

Use of Paraprofessionals in Specific Circumstances

Common practice for the use of paraprofessionals includes their use with students perceived to require one-to-one attention, such as those students who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder or severe disabilities. However, there is little research evaluating the effectiveness of paraprofessional usage with particular subgroups of students. Interestingly enough, the literature describes how to teach paraprofessionals to use specific techniques such as social skills instruction, technology use, or use of augmentative communication with these and other students. Of the literature found, practices for the use of paraprofessional support with students who are visually impaired were described, as well information regarding the effects of paraprofessional proximity and full inclusion.

Visual impairment. Two articles were found that discussed the use of paraprofessionals for students with visual impairments. Each article cited the same concerns related by the literature for the use of paraprofessionals in general: paraprofessionals often do not have adequate training for the jobs they are asked to perform, paraprofessional use may encourage teachers to become less engaged with their students, and paraprofessionals may inadvertently isolate the students with whom they work (Forster & Holbrook, 2005; Conroy, 2007). Conroy offers potential solutions. He suggests that school districts provide specialized training, supervision, and alternatives to
use of paraprofessionals as the sole support for students with visual impairments. He also suggests using peer support as an alternative. Forster and Holbrook establish the need for trained paraprofessionals in limited and specific roles for the full inclusion of students with visual impairment. They suggest that paraprofessionals be used to help students with visual impairments gain greater access to learning materials and the general education curriculum.

Full inclusion and proximity. In a study that looked at the effects of paraprofessional proximity and students with disabilities, Giangreco et al. (1997) found several potential detrimental effects. Those effects include student dependence on adults, lack of teacher engagement, loss of gender identity, loss of personal control, limited access to competent instruction, and separation from classmates. Although Giangreco et al., did not suggest the removal of paraprofessionals from special and general education classes, they did suggest that the process for assigning one-on-one paraprofessionals be reviewed and that further research be conducted to determine more appropriate service delivery options. French (2003) found two effects of paraprofessional proximity and students with autism. The first effect was less teacher contact for students whose paraprofessionals remained within 2 feet of them. The second finding was that students who were working with peers, as opposed to paraprofessionals, were more likely to be on task. The conclusion drawn from this observation was that paraprofessionals are more appropriately used to encourage peer interactions.

Techniques for teaching students who are severely disabled. Parsons and Reid (1999) developed a program for training paraprofessionals to teach students who have
severe disabilities. The program began by training 9 support personnel and 4 administrators to teach basic skills to students with severe disabilities. Since that time, the researchers have trained over 300 paraprofessionals. The program focused on task-analysis, least-to-most assistive prompting, reinforcement, and error correction as techniques for paraprofessionals to use when teaching adaptive skills. The authors of the training program report that students made progress toward learning adaptive skills. In terms of training paraprofessionals, the authors describe techniques they found to be effective. Techniques for training the paraprofessionals included a classroom component, on-the-job monitoring and feedback, and follow up supervision. Furthermore, they describe ways to deliver training, such as direct training (supervisor to paraprofessional) and pyramid training (training one paraprofessional who then trains several others simultaneously).

Promoting social interaction. Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005) echo the concerns of other researchers regarding paraprofessional proximity and peer interactions for students with disabilities. To counter these concerns, they have compiled techniques for improving interaction for students who have one-on-one paraprofessionals assigned to them. They begin by acknowledging that paraprofessionals are supervised by educators. With that in mind, they reiterate that special and general educators bear the ultimate responsibility for the students in their charge. They are to determine which of the techniques proposed are appropriate and are responsible to train and educate paraprofessionals in their use. The authors suggest that paraprofessionals can implement the following techniques to increase social interaction: highlight similarities between the
students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, teach and practice social interaction skills, point out social opportunities and ways to engage others, teach others how to interact with students who have disabilities, and keep students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible.

Supporting behavior plans. French (2003) reports that boys with ADHD were shown to have improved behavior when paraprofessionals were used to teach social skills and provide token reinforcement for appropriate behavior. In addition, positive behavioral support is listed as a benefit of paraprofessional use by Giangreco et al. (2005). In contrast, case law has supported the assignment of a paraprofessional to support behavior plans only when a student's access to FAPE was restricted (Etscheidt, 2005).

Using Paraprofessionals to Help Implement the Provisions of RTI

Hauerwas and Goessling (2008) propose using paraprofessionals to help implement Response to Intervention (RTI). In their study of a Rhode Island program, they identified recommendations for effective paraprofessional use. Recommendations included incorporating paraprofessionals in school-wide intervention teams, greater use in the assessment process, better professional development, and increased common planning time with teachers.

Summary

No studies described exactly what the best practices for the use and training of paraprofessionals are as well as provided data to prove its effectiveness. Each study carried within it a piece of what should be considered when using paraprofessionals for
special education service delivery. In many cases, the literature describes what not to do: do not use paraprofessionals who are ill-trained for their jobs, do not allow paraprofessionals to hover or "over-help" their charges, do not allow them to work without adequate supervision, and do not allow them to teach new concepts or provide the sole instruction to students with disabilities. Case law describes when paraprofessionals must be used: to ensure FAPE. NCLB states how paraprofessionals may be used: to reinforce concepts, to monitor media labs, encourage parent involvement, and organize materials. Most of the literature suggested at the very least, paraprofessionals should be trained, supervised, respected, and given clear job descriptions. Additionally, very few programs have detailed how to use paraprofessionals with specific populations, how to appropriately supervise paraprofessionals, or how to determine appropriate alternatives to their use. Two articles were found detailing comprehensive programs. Summaries follow.

*The Consultation and Paraprofessional Pull-In System (CAPPS)*

This program, described in 1995 by Welch, Richards, Okada, Richards, and Prescott, is predicated on shared responsibility in service delivery. Shared service delivery is comprised of a resource/consulting teacher (R/CT), pull-in programming, and paraprofessional utilization for service delivery. The R/CT provides direct instruction to students with IEPs for part of the day, and, through consultation, indirect services to teachers working with students who require special education services. Paraprofessionals are used to provide remediation to those students who require it within the general education classroom under the supervision of the R/CT. The authors considered
successful components of the program to be the “pull-in” vs. “pull-out” model of service delivery and the collaboration between the R/CT, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals. Student academic growth and participants’ attitudes were used to determine program effectiveness. Growth was shown in 1st and 4th grades; teachers from the sites using the CAPPS model preferred it to previously used models 77% to 23%.

Addressing the Paraprofessional Dilemma in an Inclusive School: A Program Description

One other program was described in the literature. Giangreco et al. (2006) describe a program used in one K-8 inclusion school in Vermont. Steps in this program include (a) establishing a planning team to look at concerns, (b) screening for overreliance on paraprofessionals, (c) identifying four particular areas of concern, (d) assessing current school practices, (e) developing an alternative to current practices, (f) implementing the new plan and collecting data, and finally, (g) communicating the results. Several site changes were made that had significant impact on the delivery of special education services. Paraprofessional supervision duties were moved from special education teachers to general education teachers. This allowed the special education teachers more time to plan and implement lessons with students. School-wide support was increased along with teacher training, resulting in fewer special education referrals and reduced special educator caseloads. One of the biggest changes resulting from the program was the development of a new model for service delivery. Paraprofessional assignments shifted from one-on-one assignments to classroom assignments. General education and special education teachers reported more direct instruction time for
students with disabilities resulting in an increase of students working more independently and achieving better overall academically.

Neither of these methodologies has been researched in larger contexts or is agreed by a number of “experts” to be either the ultimate model or so effective as to be adopted as such, leaving nothing definitive from which to derive best practices. However, they may be used as examples that were effective in the context in which they were applied and suggest directions from which specific school districts or sites may proceed.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Research

Research to complete the literature review was conducted by searching the databases Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and PsychArticles for journal articles using key words. The terms paraprofessional and paraeducator were used in combination with key words thought likely to reveal information regarding their appropriate use and training, as well as other pertinent information. Additional key words included in the search were: special education, teaching standards, training, full inclusion, autism, mental retardation, visual impairment, deaf, service delivery, and law, specifically, case law, IDEA, and NCLB. Additional search topics included were paraeducators’ demographic characteristics descriptions and current practices in their use and training. Authors known to have studied the field were also used as search determinants: M. Giangreco, N.K. French, Riggs, Mueller, and Pickett. References lists from articles were examined for additional information. Articles that were selected to be included in the literature review were written for professionals working in the field of special education. Articles that were not in professional journals were excluded. Articles that did not include information regarding the use of paraprofessionals in special education were generally excluded, although in some cases articles included information regarding paraprofessionals working in both general education and special education settings or working with special education students and general education students. Articles that were written prior to the year 2000, with the exception of articles that were the sole
source of data for a particular topic area or considered to be the seminal work, were excluded. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered. The number of articles was then narrowed down to approximately sixty and categorized by the themes.

Development of Presentation

The presentation was developed to provide a succinct overview of the results from the literature review and a method for leading school sites through their practices regarding paraprofessional use and training with the ultimate goal of improving site practices. It is designed to be delivered by anyone who has read this thesis and who has experience in the field of special education and use of paraprofessionals. The presentation was adapted from one previously constructed for the purpose of informing others about the thesis project. When best practices were unavailable in the literature, they were extrapolated from sources that outlined poor practices, assuming that recommending the opposite of what not to do would likely result in what to do. It is designed to be presented over the course of four sessions, each lasting from thirty minutes to an hour, depending upon audience discussion and questions. Discussion topics within the presentation include: exploration of current site practices regarding use, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals, areas for appropriate data collection (including a specific example of teacher engagement), development of a checklist for the assignment of paraprofessionals to students, and consideration of necessary next steps in the process of improving site practices. Appropriate audience members would include administrators, special and general education teachers, program specialists, and paraprofessionals. Because the presentation was not delivered to an audience prior to the
submission of the project, informal feedback was requested from school psychology faculty, two special education teachers and a special education department chair. Suggestions included making sure information is provided in a way that leaves participants feeling open to possibilities as opposed to feeling they are “wrong” and to provide anecdotes of paraprofessional use that is specific to the intended audience. This might be accomplished by interviewing participants prior to the delivery of the inservice or beginning the presentation with a discussion of site practices. Audiences, in that case, would hear examples pertinent to their practice. The PowerPoint presentation is provided in the appendix, as well as on CD to be easily presented from a computer and projector.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Best Practices for the Use and Training of Paraprofessionals

*Best Practices for the Use and Training of Paraprofessionals* is summarized in a PowerPoint presentation intended to first inform school sites and/or districts of best practices, second, to lead them through the process of examining their use and training of paraprofessionals, and third, to help them work toward increasing their use of best practices. It is structured so that opportunities to discuss site/district practices are incorporated within the presentation. At each major juncture in the presentation (the law, appropriate use, training and supervision, and data collection), discussion time is built in to compare site practices to best practices. As discussion of current site practices occurs, comparisons can be made with best practices and choices made regarding how paraprofessionals are to be used and trained. In addition, specific instruments are discussed to further the goal of improving practices. A checklist to help determine if the site over-relies on paraprofessionals is included for discussion as well as a checklist for IEP teams to use and/or adapt to help decide whether the assignment of a paraprofessional to a student is appropriate. Additionally, the presentation includes an example of data collection, along with possible topics on which to collect data for use to evaluate effectiveness of program changes.

Conclusions

In addition to compiling a presentation to inform IEP teams regarding the best practices for the use and training of paraprofessionals, the purpose of this project was to
help answer the following questions: what are the laws regarding the use and training of paraprofessionals, how can school districts guarantee paraprofessionals are qualified to do what is asked of them, where are paraeducators used most effectively, and most importantly, how does the use of paraprofessionals for special education service delivery ensure the best outcomes for students? These questions were difficult to answer specifically from the literature, but general directions are evident.

The Law

Although paraprofessional use and training is described in both IDEA and NCLB, neither is detailed sufficiently to act as more than a general guideline. Case law supports the use of a paraprofessional to ensure a free appropriate public education. Key portions of IDEA and NCLB include a basic level of education for paraprofessional employment, a requirement for on-going training for paraprofessionals, and supervision by credentialed teachers. NCLB describes the types of activities that paraprofessionals can be expected to engage in such as leading small groups or working with individuals, particularly for the purpose of review and remediation (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Snyder, 2003). They should not, however, be introducing new concepts or be the sole provider of instruction for students receiving special education. In light of the lack of specific information, states are left to determine appropriate practices themselves. It is difficult to determine how that happens. In California, for example, the only information regarding the use of paraprofessionals found echoed the provisions of NCLB (California Department of Education, n. d.). In the absence of state guidelines, by default, districts determine best practices.
Guaranteeing Paraprofessionals are Appropriately Trained

Very little research has tied paraprofessional training to improved student outcomes. However, common sense would suggest that someone who is trained will be better prepared to deliver services. Sites and districts are responsible to provide training as are the certificated teachers assigned to supervise paraprofessionals. Training can occur at the individual level, site level, and/or district level. Several sources confirmed that training of paraprofessionals is necessary to the successful provision of services to students receiving special education (Carroll, 2001; Council for Exceptional Children, 2000; Riggs, 2001).

Using Paraprofessionals Effectively

As previously mentioned, data does not exist to describe how paraprofessionals may be used most effectively, although both training and supervision have been mentioned as significant. Just as supervision is important to ensure training, supervision is important in ensuring paraprofessionals are used effectively. Teachers are more thoroughly trained to provide instruction than are paraprofessionals. Their greater knowledge of curriculum, learning styles, and successful teaching methods can be used to design lessons that help paraprofessionals effectively address student needs.

Additionally, data from studies that describe potential detrimental effects can be used to determine what should be avoided. Giangreco et al., 1997 interviewed and observed students who received one-on-one paraprofessional assistance, documenting several potential detriments. Loss of personal identity, social isolation, and a sense of being “mothered” were all noted as potentially damaging. Methods for avoiding these
pitfalls have yet to be developed. It is theorized that conscientious practice that includes training and supervision could help paraprofessionals to avoid these potential harmful effects.

*Ensuring the Best Outcomes for Students*

None of the studies examined directly how paraprofessional use affected student academic outcomes. In order to ensure that use of paraprofessionals is an effective option for providing special education services, further study needs to be designed and implemented to examine each factor involved in paraprofessional use. Issues such as paraprofessional proximity, student time spent with paraprofessionals, paraprofessional training, and paraprofessional supervision all require analysis to determine how they may affect student outcomes. Implementing a continual process of reviewing which practices are working and which are not, in combination with a review of research, could improve a site’s practice in using paraprofessionals.

**Recommendations**

*Presentation Recommendations*

Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to deliver the PowerPoint presentation. In order to determine if it is effective at providing the information required to promote change in site practices, it would be necessary to give the presentation, collect data from the site to find out what was learned, collect data to determine if the site’s process changed because of the presentation information, and finally, collect data to determine if student outcomes improved. Data could be collected via survey, observation, or formal/informal feedback.
Research Recommendations

In terms of the project itself, data on district practices would have been useful in understanding just what districts decide given the seeming lack of information they have on best practices. Additionally, it would have been useful to know if school districts see a need for changing the way paraprofessionals are used. Personal experience as a paraprofessional has convinced me that paraprofessional use for special education service delivery is controversial, but not that districts feel a need to revise their practices.

In terms of research for the field, further exploration of the concept of least restrictive environment and the provision of special education services by one-on-one paraprofessionals is an area that has not been well-examined. Additional examination of student independence, loss of gender and personal identity, and increased social isolation, is necessary to determine if the least restrictive environment is being encroached upon.

There are no definitive best practices for the use and training of paraprofessionals. There are general guidelines provided in IDEA, NCLB, and case law. Studies and surveys point in the direction that best practices should go; however, they lack the empirical evidence to provide the support necessary to be considered “proven”. There are several factors that must be considered: student needs matched to paraprofessional knowledge and experience, paraprofessionals’ abilities to work within their team, teachers’ abilities to supervise and provide training, and student independence and social isolation are but a few. None of the studies reviewed advocates eliminating the use of paraprofessionals, merely ensuring they are used in ways that improve student outcomes. Possibly the ultimate question to ask is: what is best for the child? In consideration of the
child, all factors must be taken into account: what is the least restrictive environment for a student, when does a student need assistance and when can s/he function independently, and what are students' needs for engagement with peers? These factors must be considered within the context that the goal of education is to promote, to the degree possible, independently functioning students. Additional research is necessary to determine how these factors influence best practices for the use and training of paraprofessionals, but more importantly, to determine their effect on student outcomes.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Best Practices PowerPoint Presentation
Best Practices for the Use and Training of Paraprofessionals

Day One: Overview

By Natalie Zehnder

How Are Paraprofessionals Commonly Used?

- Service delivery for students receiving special education
- Most common usage is as one-on-one to students in full inclusion programs
- Program assistants: work in a general education classroom with general education students and students receiving special education services
- Teachers' assistants: provide organizational and instructional support for a teacher
Purpose

- To understand Best Practices for the Use and Training of Paraprofessionals
  - Geared toward school psychologists, special education teachers, general education teachers, and administrators (IEP team members)
  - Intended to help standardize practice and in doing so, promote positive student outcomes.

Terms to know:

- Paraprofessional/paraeducator as used in this presentation
- IEP (Individualized Education Program)
- LRE (Least Restrictive Environment)
- FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education)
- Full Inclusion
- Service Delivery
- NCLB (No Child Left Behind)
- IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
Why is this important?

- Increase in use of paraprofessionals
- Issues of Appropriate vs. Inappropriate Use
- Issues of Paraprofessional Training
- The Law: NCLB/IDEA/Case Law
- Ethical considerations
  - LRE
  - Effective and appropriate supports

Concerns Regarding the Use of Paraprofessionals

- Least trained people are working with students who have most learning challenges
- Adequate supervision is often lacking
- Ill-defined role, inadequate training
- No research has been completed to show that students benefit from paraprofessional support
- Research has shown that there are detrimental effects when using 1:1 paraprofessionals

Giangreco & Broer (2005)
**Increased Use of Paraprofessionals**

Possible explanations include:

- **IDEA**
  - Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- **Full inclusion**
  - As a service delivery model
  - Belief that Fi is not successful without a paraprofessional
  - Parent Request
- **Lack of qualified Special Education teachers**

**Supervision and Retention**

- **Supervision**
  - Paraprofessionals often bear the sole responsibility for the instruction of their student or student(s)
  - Teachers are not trained in how to supervise, resulting in poor or no supervision
- **Retention**
  - Well-trained, efficient, effective people are hard to find
  - Issues for paraprofessionals related to retention
    - No respect
    - Low pay
    - Asked to do what teachers "should" be doing
### Potential Effects of Using Paraprofessionals

**Student perceptions of their experiences:**
- **Positive**
  - Same age, same gender paraprofessionals are friend/role model
  - Protection from bullying
  - Academic and behavior support
- **Negative**
  - Excessive “mothering”
  - Interference with peer relationships
  - Unaware of bullying
  - Lack of independence

Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco (2005)

### Potential Effects of Using Paraprofessionals, continued

**Parent perceptions:**
- **Positive**
  - Bridge cultural gaps
  - Bridge other communication gaps with teachers and others
  - Provide creative instruction
  - Required to help child be successful
- **Negative**
  - Paraprofessionals are doing the work of teachers
  - Need more training

Daniels & McBride, 2001; Gessler-Werts, Harris, Young-Tillery, & Roark (2004)
Potential Effects of Using Paraprofessionals, continued

Teacher perceptions:
- Dedicated, caring individuals
- Flexible
- Kid magnets— not just for kids in special education, but for all students

Detrimental Effects of Paraeducator Use

Other researchers have found detrimental effects.
- Proximity can lead to--
  - Reduced teacher engagement with student
  - Reduced peer interactions
  - Over-reliance on adults
  - Loss of gender identity
  - Loss of personal control
  - Less competent instruction

The Law

- NCLB
- IDEA
- Case Law

NCLB
(No Child Left Behind), 2001

- Idea to improve student outcomes by improving teacher and paraeducator quality
- States and districts must define:
  - Duties of paraeducators
  - Employment: who is right for the job?
  - Preparation/training: have the content knowledge and skills to serve students with disabilities
  - Assessment and evaluation of paraeducators
- Supervision: how will it be accomplished?
- Education: level required to be "qualified"
- Applies to all paraeducators funded by Title 1 monies
**NCLB: Paraprofessional Duties**

- Provide one-on-one tutoring, if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher
- Assist with classroom management, such as organizing instructional materials
- Provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory
- Conduct parental involvement activities
- Provide support in the library or media center
- Act as translators and/or
- Provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a teacher


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**NCLB: Supervision**

- The qualified teacher must prepare the lessons and all instructional support activities as well as conduct any assessments required for the students involved with a paraprofessional
- Paraeducator must work under the direct supervision of a qualified teacher.
- Paraeducator must work closely with the teacher in terms of instructional planning and proximity
**NCLB: Paraprofessional Education Requirements (CA)**

- At least two years of education beyond high school, have obtained an associate’s degree, or pass a state exam that demonstrates knowledge of instructional techniques for the instruction of reading, writing and mathematics
- State Board of Education has defined “two years of study” as 48 semester units
- Localities are to select their own assessments as well as determine the type of course work that qualifies
- Requires that any paraprofessional engaged in an instructional capacity at a school receiving Title 1, Part A funds have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent

California Department of Education (n.d.)

**IDEA**

- Provides general requirements for paraprofessionals
- State sets standards for appropriate preparation and training of paraeducators to ensure that they have the content knowledge and skills to serve students with disabilities
- Paraprofessionals shall not work under provisional or temporary or emergency certification or licensure
- Once requirements are met, paraprofessionals are to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services.

Carroll (2001)
Case Law and Paraeducators

- Support use of paraeducators to provide FAPE
- Selection and employment of paraeducators is an administrative decision
- Paraeducators must have experience and be adequately trained for the job they are to perform (Autism, Mental Retardation, medical needs, for example)
- Legal responsibility for instructional planning belongs to IEP team and qualified special education teacher

Etscheidt (2005)

Best Practices for Training

- Required by law
- Requested by paraprofessionals
- Time Investment
  - Special education teachers estimate that it requires between one and twelve months of focused training to bring a new paraprofessional from entry level to proficiency in working with students

Approaches to Training

- General Practices to be implemented by supervisors of paraeducators:
  - Sharing introductory packets of pertinent information on individual students
  - Basic school orientation that included a review of teacher and school policies along with a map and bell schedules
  - Engage in a needs assessment, then training/education, and follow up with consultation

Carroll (2001)

Training, continued

- Ongoing, job-embedded communication focused directly on specific students and instructional practice
- Building level, job-focused inservice training
  - Inservices arranged by the site
- District sponsored paraprofessional development activities
  - Behavior Intervention strategies
  - Instructional strategies
  - State standards
Job-embedded Training

"On the job training"—most common

- Multiple means of daily communication
  - "On the fly"
  - Email
  - Detailed notes/instruction on how and why of student instruction
- Coaching in the instructional context with students
  - Observation
  - Modeling
- Regular meetings focused on student and instructional issues


Building and District Level Training

- **Building Level**
  - Identify needs in-common for site
  - Conduct inservices
    - Inservices may be conducted by teachers, administrators, or outside agencies
- **District Level**
  - Identify needs
  - Determine a timeframe/frequency
  - Consider training for:
    - Experienced paraprofessionals
    - New hires
    - Instructional strategies (general)
    - Work with specific populations

Use of Paraprofessionals

Inappropriate Use
- Assuming sole responsibility for instruction or provision of services
- Serving as a substitute for the qualified professional in meetings, documents, or communications
- Writing or modifying instructional plans
- Disclosing educational, clinical, or confidential information unless designated by the qualified professional
- Diagnosing learner needs, planning individualized/personalized programs
- Assessing learning outcomes

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1999); Pickett et al., (2003)

Inappropriate Use of Paraprofessionals, continued
- A program staffed entirely by paraprofessionals is not permitted
- 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
- 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

Rationale for Use of Paraprofessionals

The primary reasons paraeducators are employed:

- Increases the instructional quality and time for students with disabilities and assures their safety
- Permits a timelier response to student needs; provides differentiated strengths to the team; and allows greater flexibility in service delivery
- Full inclusion—teachers, paraeducators, and parents agree that the paraeducator makes inclusion feasible. “Without the paraeducator, inclusion would not be possible”

French & Chopra (1999)

Determining When to Use Paraprofessionals

- IEP teams must ask "Are the services necessary to provide the individual with academic or nonacademic benefit?"
- Identify the specific reasons why paraprofessional supports are being considered based on the student's needs
- Focus on needs rather than student characteristics to facilitate a match between needs and the person who has appropriate qualifications to provide services
- Plans for increased independence and social interaction must also be developed.

Giandreco, Broer, and Edelman (1999)
Determining Overuse

- Tool developed for determining if 1:1 paraprofessionals are being over-used developed by Giangreco & Broer (2007)
- 16 screening questions, all beginning with the statement, "You know there is a problem when..."
- Three qualifiers:
  - Happens too frequently
  - Happens sometimes
  - Happens rarely
- Questions include:
  - Students spend more time with paraprofessionals than with peers
  - An absent paraprofessional results in a "lost day" for the student
  - Paraprofessionals provide instruction in areas that they are under or unskilled
- Breaks down responses into problem areas for further analysis

Programs

Addressing The Paraprofessional Dilemma in an Inclusive School: A Model Program

Intended to ensure appropriate use of paraprofessionals
- Step 1: Establish a planning team.
- Step 2: Conduct screening for problematic paraprofessional practices in an effort to determine if the school is overreliant on paraprofessionals.
- Step 3: Rank four problem clusters (based on screening data).
- Step 4: Become knowledgeable about existing alternatives to overreliance or inappropriate utilization of paraprofessionals.
- Step 5: Engage in a self-assessment (20 items) of the school's current practices in regular and special education.
Programs, continued

- Step 6: Prioritize the areas of greatest need (based on the self-assessment).
- Step 7: Consider possibilities to adopt, adapt, or invent alternatives.
- Step 8: Develop and implement an action/evaluation plan to address the priorities.
- Step 9: Review implementation/evaluation data and summarize the plan’s impact.
- Step 10: Communicate activities, progress, and outcomes to the school community.

Giangreco, Smith, & Pinckney (2006)

Programs, continued

- Consultation and Paraprofessional Pull-in System (CAPPS)
- Service Delivery model
  - Addressed needs of special education students as well as general education students
- Three areas of shared responsibility:
  - Resource/consulting teacher (R/CT)
  - Pull-in programming (push-in)
  - Paraprofessionals
- Services provided:
  - Student assessment by R/CT
  - Direct services by R/CT
  - Consultation with general education teachers and paraprofessionals by R/CT
  - Services delivered to students by general education teachers and paraprofessionals

Welch, Richards, Okada, Richards, & Prescott (1995)
Bottom Line

- Hire appropriately educated paraprofessionals
- Provide on-going training
- Match paraprofessional experience and training to student needs
- Follow the law and non-regulatory guidelines when using paraprofessionals
- Provide a balanced-use approach to student support that includes the development of student independence and interpersonal skills

Evaluating Site Practices

- Discussion
  - Who are the paraprofessionals at this site? (Names, full time/part time)
  - To which classes/students are they assigned?
  - What are their jobs/ how are they used?

- Next Steps
  - Day Two: Review best practices regarding use
  - Improving practices at this site
    - Begin noticing how paraprofessionals are used
    - Consider what is working, what isn't
    - Be prepared for next meeting
Best Practices for the Use and Training of Paraprofessionals

Day Two:
Improving Site Practices for Use of Paraprofessionals

Day Two: Overview

- Discussion of current uses for paraeducators at site
- Consider those providing special education service delivery only
  - One-on-one service delivery
  - Small group instruction
  - "Floaters"—classroom paraprofessionals
- What seems to be working?
- Where is there room for improvement?
Law Review

- Paraprofessionals must:
  - Be supervised by a credentialed teacher
  - Be appropriately trained for the services they provide

- Paraprofessionals must not:
  - Be sole provider of instruction
  - Make educational decisions without teacher input
  - Introduce new skills or concepts


Appropriate Uses

- Small group instruction to review/remEDIATE concepts
- Individual instruction for above
- Behavior support/keeping students on task
- Encouraging social skills/peer interaction
**Remediation/Review**

- Teacher plans instruction
- Push in model
- Pull out model
- Potential uses
  - Pre-teaching vocabulary
  - Rote skills - math algorithms, spelling, test review
- Are they just for special education use?
  - Mixed groups are okay – increased opportunity for social interaction
- Ideas from site?

**Behavior Support**

- Review rules for student before activity
- Provide feedback for students with BSPs
  - Positive Feedback
  - Cue
  - Rule reminder when off-task/during activity
  - Technique reminder
    - i.e., for anger management, “Take deep breath”, etc.
- Collect data regarding BSP effectiveness
**Social Skills**  
**Instruction/Increasing Peer Interaction**

- Teach specific skills  
- Remind students of commonalities  
- Encourage interaction  
- Set up situations that require students with and without disabilities to work together  
- What might this look like in practice? Share examples, brainstorm ideas.

Cauton-Theoharis & Malmgren (2005)

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**Using Best Practices to Improve Site Practices**

- Review of site’s current practices as discussed at beginning of Day Two presentation  
- Are those uses consistent with best practices?  
  - Are paraprofessionals being used in accordance with the law?  
  - Are they appropriately trained for the tasks they are asked to perform?  
  - Are they supervised by credentialed teachers?  
  - Are they advocating for and working toward student independence?  
  - Are teachers retaining responsibility for their students’ classroom success?  
  - Consider a program, such as the one proposed by Giangreco & Broer (2007), as outlined Day One, to prioritize issues.
Discussion

- Comparison of site practices to best practices
- Next step: Development of a checklist for determining who needs a paraprofessional

Who Needs a Paraprofessional?

Considerations:
- Match student needs (not characteristics) to paraprofessional experience and training
- Develop a plan for fading 1:1 paraprofessional use
- IEP team checklist
  - Site discussion of considerations for assignment of a paraprofessional
IEP Team Checklist for Assignment of Paraprofessionals

• Adapted from Mueller & Murphy (2001)
• Applied to students who require support 50% of day or more
• Reviewed annually or more frequently as needed
• Completed by IEP team including paraeducator
• Their considerations:
  ◦ Specific needs of student
  ◦ Increasing student independence
  ◦ Increasing social acceptance
  ◦ Addressing “real” vs. “perceived” student needs

Intensive Needs Checklist

1. Safety concerns for self or others?
2. Continual teacher prompting required?
3. Functional skills assistance needed?
4. Performance consistent with aptitude?
5. Level of peer acceptance
6. Individual or small group instruction currently provided?
7. List current interventions provided and effectiveness/acceptability
8. Administrator observation of student

Adapted from Murphy & Mueller (2001)
Additional Considerations

- **Student's Needs and Abilities Matrix**
  - Outlines when student needs assistance
  - Highlights student strengths
  - Includes plans to increase independence
  - Includes plans to increase peer interaction
- **Plan for paraeducator assistance**
  - Outlines when, where, and for how long assistance will be necessary

*Murphy & Mueller (2001)*

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**Site-Specific Checklist for IEP Teams to Consider**

- **Which of previous checklist points are workable for this site?**
- **For consideration:**
  - Previously reviewed checklist
  - NCLB, IDEA, and Case Law
  - Paraprofessional's experience and training
  - With whom to use checklist
Site Checklist for Assignment of Paraprofessionals

- Walk through considerations important for this site
- Example of student with Autism Spectrum Disorder who has minimal academic needs, but high need for behavior support and social skills training
- What factors are important to consider for this student?

Student Example, continued

- Does this student need paraprofessional support?
- How can behavior support be accomplished?
  - Alternatives to paraprofessional support
  - With paraprofessional support
  - Teacher responsibility
- How can peer interaction be improved?
  - Pair with a peer
  - Set student up with conversation starters
This Site’s Checklist

- What are important considerations?
  - Teachers
  - Parents
  - Paraprofessionals
  - Student
    - Needs
    - Independence level
    - Social needs

What is needed to make all of these ideas work?

- Day Three topics
- Come prepared to discuss site practices regarding:
  - Training
  - Supervision
- Questions
Best Practices for Use and Training of Paraprofessionals

Day Three: Training and Supervision

Training Overview

- Initial training
- Identifying needs
- On-going and subsequent training
- Retention
- Paying for training
Initial Training

- Discussion: What happens when a paraprofessional is hired? How is s/he provided orientation to the site and/or the job?
- Emphasize roles and responsibilities, learner characteristics, and job-specific needs initially
- Provide a set of core competencies
- Riggs suggests:
  - Behavior management
  - Communication with adults
  - Instructional strategies
  - Learning styles
  - Problem-solving

Initial Training, continued

- Second steps: Identify paraprofessional training needs
  - Surveys of paraprofessionals and teachers
  - Can be accomplished through communication and/or observation with paraprofessionals
- Prioritize by greatest need

Riggs (2001)
**Identifying Needs**

- **Determine where training will occur**
  - Job-embedded
    - Delivered by supervising teacher
    - Individualized training for one paraprofessional
  - On-site
    - For small group of paraprofessionals with similar needs
  - District
    - District determined needs addressed

**Training Begins at Hiring**

- **Orientation meeting**
  - School packet with map
  - Bell schedule
  - Staff information
  - Student information
  - Determine and communicate your program and student needs
- **Clearly defined job description**
  - Expectations: site and teacher
  - Include the law and ethical considerations
- **What might a paraprofessional's job description look like here?**
Conducted by Supervising Teacher

- Regular meetings/communication
  - Email
  - "On the fly"
  - Before/after school/recess
  - Monthly: classroom/site meetings
  - Two to three times per year: district meetings
  - Plan for in advance

Training of Individual Paraprofessionals

- Meetings:
  - Provide on-going communication to reveal training needs
  - Communicate responsibilities
  - Create exchange between supervisor and paraprofessional regarding student needs
- Document training provided

French (2002)
**On-going Training**

- Determined by paraprofessional needs
- Can occur at individual level, site level, or district level
- Is requested by paraprofessionals and teachers
- Is required by law
- What is already in place that can be used/is used to train paraeducators?

**Retention**

- Respect
  - Know paraprofessionals' interests
  - Acknowledge experience and knowledge
  - Accept responsibility for all students' needs (Riggs, 2004)
- Other
  - Improve wages
  - Develop good match between paraprofessional and job (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007)
- How can sites show respect for their paraprofessionals?
**Paying for Training**

- NCLB Title I, Part A funds, Title II funds
- General funds
- Grants
  - OSEP
  - Private foundations

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**Supervision**

- How do individual supervisors see their roles?
- Teachers are credentialed and trained to provide instruction/curriculum for students
- Suggestions for supervision
  - Communicate student needs
  - Communicate regularly
  - Get and give feedback
  - Evaluation is a two-way street
Providing Supervision

- Trade information regarding work styles
  - Structured or unstructured?
  - Last minute or in-advance?
  - Messy or neat-freak?
- Classroom management style
- Delegate skillfully
  - Know what paraprofessional is trained to do
  - Communicate goals and objectives of task
- Provide work plans
  - Specific instructional plans for students
  - Include timelines for completion
  - Allow time for clarification

French (2002)

Providing Supervision, continued

- Monitor delegated tasks
- Create a master schedule
  - Which students need what services when?
  - Include classroom routine/schedule
- Hold meetings as previously described
- Deal with conflict immediately and constructively
Discussion

- Does the site need support to provide supervision and/or training?
- How can this be addressed?
- Day Four: Next Steps
  - Review of site practices
  - Data collection

Best Practices for Use and Training of Paraprofessionals

Day Four:
Next Steps
Potential Alternatives

- **Peer tutoring and support**
  - **Benefits:** increases social interaction/social acceptance, potentially reinforces learning for both students
  - **Detriments:** requires structure, peers academically strong enough to cooperate
- **Work toward increased independence**
- **Program paraprofessionals vs. one-on-one paraprofessionals**
  - Increased student independence
  - Increased social interaction/social acceptance
- **Other ideas?**

Discussion

- **What changes have been made?**
- **What has worked?**
- **What still needs to be changed?**
  - How can site address needed changes?
- **Needs for further training?**
  - **Who?** (paraprofessionals, teachers, and/or administrators)
  - **What kind?** (Possible examples)
    - Information regarding use and training of paraprofessionals
    - Information regarding supervision
    - Information regarding instructional strategies
    - Information regarding specific populations of students receiving special education services
**Data Collection: Potential Options**

- **Uses of paraprofessionals**
  - Do uses match best practices?

- **Training and supervision for paraprofessionals**
  - Are paraprofessionals getting needed training and supervision?

- **How will the site determine if the changes made have been successful?**
  - Improved student outcomes

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**Data Collection**

- **How will we measure student outcomes?**
  - Gather baseline data for district and state testing
  - Gather baseline data regarding teacher engagement
  - Gather baseline data regarding social contact between students with disabilities and those without
## Testing Data

- **State**
  - Available from STAR data sent to sites and district
  - Available from California State Department of Education
- **District**
  - English/Language Arts testing
    - Writing samples
    - Other
  - Math testing
- **Classroom**
  - Annual achievement data gathered on students receiving special education
  - Teacher gathered data (Unit tests, etc.)

## Other Data

- **Teacher Engagement**
  - Observation
  - Teacher/staff/parent report
- **Social Interaction**
  - Observation
  - Teacher/staff/parent report
- **Site specific data? (Examples may include)**
  - Behavior
  - General education students’ improvements
  - Number of students with 1:1 paraprofessionals
  - Site perceptions of changes (by survey)
    - Teachers
    - Students
    - Paraprofessionals
    - Parents
Data Gathering Checklists

- Collect baseline data for comparison purposes
- Teacher Engagement Survey example
- Other areas of interest to be developed by site: (possible examples)
  - Behavior
  - Student independence
  - Social Interaction

Teacher Engagement Survey

Data Collection Survey—Teacher Engagement

Teacher Survey Date:

# of students on IEPs: # of Paraprofessionals in class:

- In the past month, how often have you planned lessons for your students receiving paraprofessional support?
- In the past month, how often has the paraprofessional working with your students planned lessons?
- In the past month, how often has the paraprofessional had to use his/her own judgment to change or adapt student curriculum?
- Estimate the number of individual interactions (regardless of time spent) you have had with the students receiving special education services in your classroom?
  Positive: Negative:
- Any additional information:
Teacher Engagement Survey

Data Collection Survey—Teacher Engagement

Paraprofessional Survey  Date:

- # of students on IEPs:  # of Paraprofessionals in class:
- In the past month, how often have you planned lessons for your students receiving paraprofessional support?
- In the past month, how often has the teacher working with your students planned lessons?
- In the past month, how often have you had to use your own judgment to change or adapt student curriculum?
- Estimate the number of individual interactions (regardless of time spent) the teacher has had with the students receiving special education services in the classroom?
  Positive:  Negative:
- Additional information:

Teacher Engagement Survey

Data Collection Survey—Teacher Engagement

Parent or Student Survey  Date:

- # of Paraprofessionals in class:
- In the past month, how often have you (or your student) participated in whole group lessons delivered by the teacher?
- In the past month, how often have you (or your student) had individual or small group lessons with the paraprofessional?
- In the past month, how often has the paraprofessional changed or adapted the lesson on the spot?
- Estimate the number of individual interactions (regardless of time spent) the teacher has with you (or your student) in the classroom?
  Positive:  Negative:
- Any additional information:
**Teacher Engagement Survey**

- Must be given with care to parents and students
  - Provide instruction regarding completion
  - Recognize the potential for subjectivity
- Must be interpreted with care from all participants
  - Information is from memory
  - Information is an estimate only
- May also include an observation to improve objectivity
  - Observation could tally student interactions with teachers and/or paraprofessionals and include contexts (individual, whole group, small group, positive, negative, etc.)

**Next Steps**

- Determine data to collect
- Develop data collection forms as needed
- Determine time period for collection
- Set a date to review data
- Communicate results to school community
- Determine the need for more or different data
- Determine if further changes are needed
Resources

Books


Trautman (2004b)

Resources, continued

Websites

- http://www.nrcpara.org/, National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals

- www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/Clearinghouse.html, National Clearinghouse for Paraeducator Resources, from USC

- www.cec.sped.org, Council for Exceptional Children
APPENDIX B

Facilitator's Guide
Best Practices for the Use and Training of Paraprofessionals

Facilitator’s Guide

1. This presentation is suitable for use with paraprofessionals, special and general educators, administrators, school psychologists and counselors.

2. The CD-ROM includes the presentation, participant handouts, a data collection example form, and information on how to deliver the presentation. The minimum computer requirement to run this CD is 1100 KB and the installation of Microsoft PowerPoint 2000. To use PowerPoint 2000, you need:
   a. PC with a Pentium 75-megahertz (MHz) or higher processor.
   b. Microsoft Windows 95 or later operating system, or Microsoft Windows NT Workstation operating system version 4.0 Service Pack 3 or later.

3. Background information for the facilitator is found in body of the project and within this guide.

4. The presentation is divided into 4 sessions. All session are estimated to last approximately two hours.
   a. Session 1: Overview.
   b. Session 2: Appropriate Paraprofessional Use/Improving Site Practice
   c. Session 3: Training and Supervision of Paraprofessionals/Improving Site Practice
   d. Session 4: Alternatives to Paraprofessionals/Data Collection/Next Steps
e. Sessions 1-3 can be combined into 1 session; Session 4 would be
presented after changes have been implemented for at least 1 term.

5. The goals of the presentation are as follows:
   a. School sites become aware of best practices
   b. Sites examine their practices and begin to make site-specific changes to
      improve
   c. Use of a checklist to help IEP teams determine how to appropriately
      assign a paraprofessional to an individual

6. The Facilitator's Guide is divided by presentation day and includes the following:
   a. Key Points: the main ideas of the day's presentation
   b. Discussion Topics: places to include the participants in the presentation.
      i. Designed to encourage reflection/examination of site practices
      ii. May be used to begin the process of developing practices that are
          in line with best practices
Day One Notes

1. Rationale/Big Ideas:
   a. In order to improve site practices, participants must understand them.
   b. Information regarding what is considered best practice, along with the potential effects of misusing paraprofessionals, is necessary to begin the process of examination.

2. Key Points
   a. Overview of Best Practices for the Use and Training of Paraprofessionals
   b. Terms used within presentation (slide 4)
   c. Rationale for examination of site practices
      i. Less trained personnel are working with most challenging students
      ii. Law requirements
   d. Potential effects for students
      i. Something that seems helpful (paraprofessional aid) may actually be detrimental

3. Discussion Topics
   a. Who are the paraprofessionals at the site? (slide 34)
   b. How are they currently being used? (Consider replacing slide 1 with this discussion)
   c. Does the site believe they are being used in an effective manner?
i. Encourage discussion of the evidence that indicates this and what they would see if paraprofessionals were being used in an effective manner.
Day Two Notes

1. Rationale/Big Ideas:
   a. Presentation of best practices for the use of paraprofessionals opens the discussion for how the site may consider their uses.
   b. Development of a checklist that considers site needs and values to determine when assignment of a paraprofessional is appropriate.

2. Key Points
   a. Law review regarding training, supervision, and usage (slide 37)
   b. Appropriate uses (slides 38-39)

3. Discussion Topics:
   a. Review of Day One topics (slide 36)
   b. Appropriate uses and site practices (slides 38-42)
      i. Consider short brainstorm of current uses that are effective vs. those that need to be improved or eliminated (slide 39)
      ii. How do sites use paraprofessionals to remediate? Provide other types of support? Assure that discussion touches on the many different types of support paraprofessionals can/do offer.
      iii. Walk-through an example of specific student (slides 49-50)
      iv. Discuss how peer interaction might be encouraged (slide 41)
   c. Discussion of site practices in terms of paraprofessional use
      i. Begin with overview of site uses (slide 48)
ii. Discuss what considerations must be made when assigning a paraprofessional to a student (slides 44-48). Be sure that discussion touches on all relevant issues reported in the literature.

iii. Develop a site-specific checklist to assign paraprofessionals to students

iv. End day’s presentation with comparison of site practices to best practices. Encourage discussion of both. What are some of the best practice uses already in place that can be built on at the site?
Day Three Notes

1. Rationale/Big Ideas:
   a. Training promotes retention of paraprofessionals.
   b. Training is required by law.
   c. Training goes hand-in-hand with supervision.

2. Key Points
   a. Training begins immediately—at hiring.
   b. Training is a district, site, supervisor and paraprofessional responsibility

3. Discussion Topics
   a. During all discussions keep in mind best practices and relating current practice to best practice.
   b. What happens when a paraprofessional is hired? (slide 55)
   c. How will paraprofessionals communicate their training needs?
      i. Develop ways to communicate: leave notes, send emails, set up meeting times, talk to administrator (slide 59)
   d. How will each site supervisor identify training needs?
   e. What are current site practices in terms of training? How do sites define paraprofessional roles? (slide 58)
   f. What is already in place at the site in terms of training, supervision, and communication? (slide 61)
   g. How do the site and staff show appreciation for paraprofessionals? (slide 62)
h. Supervision and staff roles discussion (slide 64)

i. What support is necessary for the site to provide supervision and training

(slide 67)
Day Four Notes

1. Rationale/Big Ideas
   a. Alternatives to paraprofessional support are necessary to improve practices.
   b. Data must be collected to determine if changes in practices have resulted in improved student outcomes.
   c. Decisions regarding what data to collect.
   d. Tie all of information together to determine next steps for site.

2. Key Points
   a. Data collection: how and why
   b. Data collection instruments: Teacher Engagement example
   c. Are changes occurring?
   d. Next Steps

3. Discussion Topics
   a. Development of alternatives to paraprofessional use (slide 69)
   b. Discussion of changes in practice that have occurred (slide 70)
   c. Areas for greater improvement (slide 70)
   d. Options for data collection (slides 71-74)
   e. Specific example of data collection (slides 76-79)
   f. Determination of next steps for site (slide 80)
4. Resources (slides 81-82). Be sure to end the discussion with a clear assignment of tasks to those who will be working to implement changes. Also include written goals indicating how the site will know when practices have been implemented.
APPENDIX C
Teacher Engagement Survey Forms
## Data Collection Survey—Teacher Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Survey</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of students on IEPs:</td>
<td># of Paraprofessionals in class:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often have you planned lessons for your students receiving paraprofessional support?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often has the paraprofessional working with your students planned lessons?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often has the paraprofessional had to use his/her own judgment to change or adapt student curriculum?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate the number of individual interactions (regardless of time spent) you have had with the students receiving special education services in your classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive:</td>
<td>Negative:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any additional information:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Survey—Teacher Engagement

(If in more than one classroom, choose the one more time is spent in)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paraprofessional Survey</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of students on IEPs:</td>
<td># of Paraprofessionals in class:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often have you planned lessons for your students receiving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paraprofessional support?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often has the teacher working with your students planned lessons?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often have you had to use your own judgment to change or adapt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student curriculum?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate the number of individual interactions (regardless of time spent) the teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had with the students receiving special education services in the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive:</td>
<td>Negative:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any additional information:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Data Collection Survey—Teacher Engagement**

(Give to students in middle school or above; for others, parents can estimate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent or Student Survey</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Paraprofessionals in class:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often have you (or your student) participated in whole group lessons delivered by the teacher?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often have you (or your student) had individual or small group lessons from the paraprofessional?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past month, how often has the paraprofessional changed or adapted the lesson on the spot?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate the number of individual interactions (regardless of time spent) the teacher has had with you (or your student)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive:</td>
<td>Negative:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any additional information:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Giandreco, M. F., Broer, S. M., & Edelman, S. W. (1999). The tip of the iceberg: Determining whether paraeducator support is needed for students with disabilities

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