

A Case Study Analysis of Paraprofessional Work, Training, and Supervision in Inclusive
Elementary Schools

by

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ABSTRACT

The utilization of paraprofessionals to deliver special education services to students with disabilities has increased sharply in recent years. The importance of this expanding role is widely acknowledged through policy and practice, but questions have been raised about how paraprofessionals are trained and supervised in the delivery of special education services to students. These realities converge to form the theoretical framework for the present study. First, the notion that paraprofessionals are an important and useful component in the social and academic inclusion of elementary school students is established in the historical and legal literature related to paraprofessional work. This illustrates the first theory proposed in the study. The second notion is established in the empirical literature, which finds that paraprofessional work is not clearly defined, training provided to paraprofessionals is lacking, and teachers are not prepared to appropriately supervise paraprofessionals. This second set of propositions sets forth the rival theory that paraprofessional supports are inappropriate for the social and academic inclusion of students with disabilities in elementary schools. The goal of this research was to understand paraprofessional work, training, and supervision in inclusive elementary schools through the development of a case study that tests these two theories. This case study, utilizing the constructions of 16 individuals involved in the organization, planning and implementation of paraprofessional work in two elementary attendance centers in a single school district, provided a means for this test. Results of the case study provide a great deal of context, lacking in previous research, regarding the work, training and supervision of paraprofessionals. In addition, although design limitations prevent the researcher from resolving the tension between the two theories that were tested, the case study shows that the dangers associated with the rival theory may be avoided when three practices are in place, that is, when a school district provides (a) adequate system-wide initial training and as-needed training designed for the acquisition of

specific skills and orientation to the district;(b) formative and summative supervision of paraprofessionals allowing for day-to-day modeling, teaching of specific skills, and year-long professional evaluations; And (c) adequate time for professional-paraprofessional collaboration during which they plan future work and develop a trusting relationship.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to the 16 professionals who gave freely of their time in order for me to complete this study and to my two children, Henry and Olivia, for their unfaltering faith in my ability to complete the project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Paraprofessionals, also known as teacher aides, paraeducators, and educational or instructional assistants, have become increasingly important in school communities. Special education paraprofessionals provide support in many different capacities; including providing one-on-one support to students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, supporting both the students and their teachers. Common activities in which paraprofessionals engage include delivering lessons, supporting self-care, creating materials, collecting data, managing behavior, supervising non-academic venues, assisting in the library, and assisting students on the bus (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; May & Marozas, 1981). Even though paraprofessionals are expected to complete this wide range of tasks, critics suggest that they receive little to no training prior to assuming these positions. In addition, there is concern about the preparation of teachers who supervise paraprofessionals.

According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Labor (2010), in 2008 there were approximately 1.1 million paraprofessionals working in “Educational Services,” including ___ [number] working with students in both public and private schools in part- or full-time positions . The National Resource Center on Paraeducators conducted a survey of state educational associations for the 1999-2000 school year in an attempt to more clearly identify the number of paraprofessionals in their roles in schools (Pickett et al., 2003). They found that information was not readily available for non-Title 1 schools. Through their survey, they identified more than 525,000 paraprofessionals in full-time positions, with approximately 55% working in special education-related roles.

Regardless of the number of paraprofessionals working in schools, their numbers are projected to grow. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected a 10% growth in jobs for

paraprofessionals between 2008 and 2018 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). This increase in paraprofessional support demands that teachers, schools, and administrators work together to prepare paraprofessionals for their roles and responsibilities.

When considering this trend of increase of paraprofessionals, it is difficult to separate those paraprofessionals involved in the support of students with disabilities and those serving the general student body. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on only those paraprofessionals working with students in special education programs, more specifically those working towards the academic and social inclusion of student in elementary school buildings.

The Problem

As paraprofessionals have become more involved in schools in even greater numbers, neither school systems nor teachers are prepared to support them in this work (“Occupational outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 edition, teacher assistants,” 2010; Picket et al., 2013); it is important to continue our understanding of the role paraprofessionals play in the delivery of special education services (Breton, 2010; Davis et al., 2007, Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2002a; Giangreco, Ederlman, et al., 2001; Minondo et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Werts et al., 2004). The literature continues to seek further work in two areas. First there is a concern that the use of paraprofessionals as supports to students with disabilities may endanger the delivery of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Giangreco argues that paraprofessional support to a student with a disability is not comparable to the educational benefit received by a student without a disability who is served by a licensed teacher for all instructional purposes. Giangreco argues that one should use the is-it-good-enough-for-a-general-education-student-test when arranging services for a student with disabilities (2002, 2010). It is also clear from administrative and judicial decisions that, in some cases, deciding not to provide paraprofessional support has led to a denial of FAPE for

students with severe disabilities whose parents argued that the paraprofessional is a necessary support (Etscheidt, 2005).

Second, there is a call for research comparing paraprofessional supports with student achievement. Early research on paraprofessionals sought to compare outcomes of students with disabilities in self-contained classrooms with and without paraprofessional supports (Jones & Bender, 1993). In the inclusive model, this research design is no longer appropriate as students no longer receive most of their instruction in a self-contained classroom. Recent publications call for the analysis of individual test scores of students with and without paraprofessional support (Giangreco, et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Study

It is the opinion of this researcher that this line of inquiry, though critically important for policy purposes, is secondary, at this point, to understanding the nature of the paraprofessional's role in the delivery of special education services, as well as how paraprofessionals are prepared for and managed in their work. As paraprofessional supports are a relatively new, and insufficiently understood evaluating their effectiveness based on student outcome data is premature. Instead there is a prior need to develop a better understanding of the nature of paraprofessional work in schools. Specifically in this regard, the present study seeks to understand the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training, and supervision in two inclusive, elementary schools, through the following research questions:

- (1) What is the nature of paraprofessional work in an inclusive setting in two elementary schools, selected as ideal models?
- (2) How are paraprofessionals being trained to support students in an inclusive setting in two elementary schools, selected as ideal models?

- (3) How are paraprofessionals being supervised in their support of students in an inclusive setting in two elementary schools, selected as ideal models?

Significance of the Study

The development of a case study of this type is unprecedented in the literature. Findings from such research would be useful in advancing the practice of administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and policy makers. This research would also contribute to theoretical knowledge concerning the nature of paraprofessional work, the development of training provided to paraprofessionals, and the implementation of supervision provided to paraprofessionals.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is a preferred method of inquiry when (a) “how” and “why” questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on contemporary phenomenon with a real-life context (Yin, 2009). Qualitative research seeks answers to the basic questions of what, where, when, and how by examining constructions of social phenomena and the individuals who collectively construct them. Qualitative methods are preferred to quantitative methods when the phenomena to be studied are complex human and organizational interactions and are therefore not easily transferable into numbers (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Skrtic, 1985).

Case Study Method

The Case Study Method is an appropriate qualitative method for the purpose of this study; that is, for developing an understanding of the natures and effects of paraprofessional work, training, and supervision from the perspectives of key players in the paraprofessional process in the case schools—the paraprofessionals themselves, the general education teachers in

whose classrooms they work, the special education teachers who deploy and manage them, and the building principles. It will be used by the researcher to “investigate real life events” (Yin, p. 4., 2009) in context by asking, “how and why questions about contemporary events when the researcher has no control over the behaviors or events in question” (Yin, p. 9, 2009).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed in this section is considered within three frames. The first frame, “The History of Paraprofessionals,” is a brief review of how the paraprofessional came to exist within the context of schooling in this country. It will chart early research into the work of the paraprofessional and discuss early programs for the support and development of the paraprofessional. The next frame, “The Legal Perspective,” will begin with the Inclusion movement and discuss why the use of paraprofessionals has increased as schools have worked to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Next, this frame will discuss the guidance local educational authorities received from both No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), on the use of paraprofessionals. Finally this frame will review case law and administrative decision regarding the implementation of paraprofessionals in public schools. The final frame, “Academic Research” will review previously published studies and meta-analyses conducted on the use of paraprofessionals and summarize the findings of this section.

History of Paraprofessionals

The use of paraprofessionals began in the early 1950s as schools sought to accommodate for a post-World War II lack of licensed teachers and balance the fledgling efforts of parents to develop community based services for children and adults with disabilities (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003). During this time two programs sought to advance the role of the paraprofessional. The Ford Foundation sponsored an initiative in Bay City, Michigan public schools. The effort sought to recruit and train unlicensed, college educated woman to handle non-academic tasks, in order to provide licensed teachers with more time to teach (“Fund for the

Advancement of Education, 1951-61," 1961). At the same time, a project at Syracuse University began to evaluate the efficacy of utilizing teacher aids in special education programs, which were emerging across the country (Cruickshank & Herring, 1957). While both of these programs showed promise, it would not be for another two decades that we would begin to consider and evaluate the benefits of teacher aides working along side licensed teachers in both general and special education classrooms (Gartner, 1971; Kaplan, 1977).

In the mid-1960s and 1970s demands for changes in economic programs, health care, education and other social service systems lead to a shift in programming. With the passage of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now called the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEA), as well as the foundation of programs focused on at-risk youth, such as Title I and Head Start, a focus began to develop on student-centered instructional services necessary to meet the varying needs of students. Under this individualized model, paraprofessionals began to be utilized as a means of providing licensed teachers with the support they required to provide this new, more individualized instruction. The role of the paraprofessional began to expand from primarily non-academic tasks to providing supports for academic activities initiated by teachers (Bowman & Klopff, 1967; Jackson & Acosta, 1971; Pickett, 1989). Paraprofessionals also served as a link between home and school, as the paraprofessional often shared the culture, tradition and language backgrounds with the community (Gartner, 1971).

The need to remove obstacles for people of diverse ethnic, cultural and language backgrounds from entering the profession coincided with the growth in paraprofessional employment. Then, as today, paraprofessionals were most often women who were either entering or re-entering the workforce. They almost always lived near the schools where they worked and shared demographic characteristics with the community in which they served

(Kaplan, 1977; Pickett et al., 2003). During the 1960s and 1970s the federal government played a role in supporting pathways to the teaching profession for paraprofessionals and other non-traditional students (Pickett et al., 2003).

Kaplan (1977) reports the results of a seven-year project supported by the U.S. Department of Education in *From Aide to Teacher: The Story of the Career Opportunities Program* (COP). The COP sought to provide support to develop degree programs which would be flexible, but not diminish the quality of teacher education programs, so as to attract and support “teachers aides” in low income urban and rural areas who desired to enter the field of education, but needed the flexibility to earn a full time income while meeting the requirements of a teacher education program. Local education authorities recruited paraprofessional who were viewed as capable of improving the quality of local schools while teacher education programs developed flexible options towards the completion of degrees and other supports necessary for students to negotiate the bureaucracies of the college experience. Kaplan found that the various components of COP proved to be an effective approach in attracting more than 20,000 non-traditional candidates from diverse racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds to the field. However, when federal funding ended, the majority of the programs ceased. Many of the lessons learned from COP are being applied today, as various constituencies seek to develop alternate pathways to the teaching profession (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

In the 1960s and 1970s Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Vermont, and Wisconsin developed professional credentialing systems for paraprofessionals (Pickett et al., 2003). Except for the systems implemented in the state of Kansas, these efforts took an administrative nature. As a result, they were not mandatory and local educational authorities (LEAs) were not required to engage paraprofessionals in training and were not required to hire individuals who met the state standards. These states

established guidelines outlining the duties of paraprofessionals and left LEAs to develop employment criteria, which included roles, training and supervision. Kansas was the only state to support LEAs in the process of systematic training of paraprofessionals through technical assistance and funding (Pickett, 1989; Pickett et al., 2003). Absent from state policies, regulation, and procedures, was direction as to who should supervise paraprofessionals. Pickett reports that a majority of LEAs designated principals as the supervisors of paraprofessionals, even in a time when the professional role included increasingly academic tasks (2003).

Through the late 1970s and 1980s neither the federal government nor state educational authorities (SEAs) re-established programs to support the development of paraprofessionals or resources for the training of special education teachers to supervise paraprofessionals. Only the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (NRCP) and the Council for Exceptional Children advocated for SEAs, LEAs and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to develop standards and curriculum for the preparation of special education teachers to plan, direct, and monitor the work of paraprofessionals. It was not until the 1990s that IHEs began to add curriculum content of this nature to their teacher preparation programs (Pickett, Vasa, & Steckleberg, 1993; Salzberg & Morgan, 1995). These factors result in what Pickett describes as paraprofessionals becoming the “forgotten members of educational teams” (p. 10, 2003).

The Legal Perspective

Inclusion

As post-PL 94-142 disability advocates rallied to promote the practice of moving special education students from self-contained programs and classrooms to regular education classrooms, the field witnessed an expansion of models for the education of students with disabilities. Mainstreaming, inclusion and partial inclusion became models upon which LEAs

built services for students with disabilities based on the principle of educating students in the least restrictive environment. While mainstreaming is the process of integrating students with disabilities into classrooms with nondisabled peers, the practice was initially done largely on a limited basis, and into classrooms with the goal of nonacademic, or social integration. Inclusion is the practice of providing all education services to students with disabilities within the general education program. Partial inclusion, is a variant of inclusion, in which students receive most of their education program in general education classroom and specialized services related to the support of individual disabilities on a ‘pull-out’ basis (Raymond, 2012).

These efforts to serve children and youth with disabilities in learning environments centered on inclusion became one of the reasons attention was turned back to paraprofessionals in the 1990s (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & McFarland, 1997; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; Pickett, 1999; Rogan & Held, 1999). Inclusion shifted the role of paraprofessionals from working alongside special education teachers to accompanying students with disabilities into general education classrooms (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). This model also marked a second period of increasing numbers of paraprofessionals. Fewer than 10,000 paraprofessionals were employed in the public schools in 1965; by the late 1980s their numbers were estimated to be over 150,000 (Pickett, 1986). According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Labor, in 2008, there were approximately 1.1 million paraprofessionals working in “Educational Services” (2010). As IDEA was reauthorized in 1997 and 2004, the practice of inclusion continues, and remains the model in which paraprofessionals work. This study’s focus on the training and supervision of paraprofessionals begins with the guidance provided by federal law, administrative/court decisions, and literature published concerning paraprofessionals.

Guidance to LEAs

Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 created the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Provisions in multiple Titles, throughout the law, address the employment criteria and supervision of paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals used before January 8, 2001, must have a high school diploma or equivalent [20 U.S.C. § 1119(1)(3)] and those used after January 8, 2002, in Title I programs must complete at least 2 years of study at an institute of higher education, obtain an associate degree or higher before employment, or meet a rigorous standard of quality, demonstrated through a formal state or local assessment in, knowledge in reading, writing, and mathematics [20 U.S.C. § 1119(1)(c)(1)]. The duties of the paraprofessional must be clearly specified, and “paraprofessionals may not provide any instruction service to students unless they work under the direct supervision of a teacher” [20 U.S.C. § 1119(1)(g)(3)(A)]. Teachers must prepare the lessons, plan the instructional support activities the paraprofessionals implement, and evaluate student performance.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act was reauthorized in 2004 and provides additional guidance on the preparation and supervision of paraprofessionals. Qualifications for paraprofessionals must be consistent with any state-approved or state-recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirement that applies to the professional discipline in which those personnel are providing special education or related services [20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(14)(B)(i)]. The certification or licensure for the paraprofessionals may not be waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis [20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(14)(B)(ii)]. Paraprofessionals may assist in the provision of special education or related services only if they are appropriately trained and supervised [20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(14)(B)(iii)]. States may impose standards or restrictions in addition to those identified in federal statutes.

Critics argue that NCLB and the IDEA provide states little guidance in establishing regulations concerning the qualifications and training of paraprofessionals (Breton, 2010; Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009; Etscheidt, 2005). Many states have developed comprehensive training and supervision models, which range from very detailed models consisting of multiple levels of qualification, to little more than NCLB's requirements for paraprofessionals working in Title I programs (Etscheidt, 2005). The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals provides links to resource on the training and supervision of paraprofessionals in each state. The organization's website lists only twenty four states as providing such services to school districts or individuals employees ("National Resource Center for Paraeducators," 2012).

In the fall of 2011, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) updated the Special Education Paraeducator Common Core standards last published in 2004. These guidelines provide a framework for the basic knowledge and skills an employee should have as they begin work as a paraprofessional. These standards were field validated by employed paraprofessionals who were members of the CEC, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association (Carter et al., 2009; "Paraeducator Development Guidelines," 2011).

Case Law and Administrative Decisions

After the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, Etscheidt completed a review of the administrative and judicial decisions concerning the need, selection, responsibility, training, supervision and qualification of paraprofessionals in an attempt to provide guidance for the implementation of the recent reauthorization (2005). Her work considered decisions with legal references or citations to the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. A total of 47 cases and rulings were considered and were organized into the following topics: (1) addressing professional need, (2)

the selection and qualifications of paraprofessionals, (3) responsibilities of paraprofessionals, and (4) the training and supervision of paraprofessionals.

Determining the Need. In the review of 15 administrative decisions and one district court decisions, Etscheidt found three considerations, which offer guidance to IEP teams in the process of determining if paraprofessional support is necessary for individuals with disabilities. First, in agreement with the literature, Etscheidt notes individual need is the first determining factor (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999; Mueller & Murphy, 2001). A student with severe disabilities may require one-on-one support, while a student with a more mild disability may be best served utilizing a classroom-based aide. Second, the IEP team must determine the nature of assistance necessary to meet a student's learning needs and IEP goals. A legal analysis reveals that IEP teams must discuss the intensity of support provided throughout the school day. Does the student require one-on-one support during the entire day or only intermittently? Finally, the team should carefully scrutinize the assignment of a paraprofessional and consider alternatives to this support. Such considerations seek to minimize the potentially harmful effects of paraprofessional assignments. Support for this practice is found in the IDEA [20 U.S.C. §1 404(29)] and the literature (Freschi, 1999; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2003; Marks et al., 1999).

Selection and Qualification. A review of eleven administrative and judicial decisions suggests that any specific qualifications necessary for a paraprofessional must be specified in a child's IEP (Etscheidt, 2005). School districts retain the ability to assign paraprofessionals unless the selection would affect a child's welfare or result in a denial of a FAPE.

Administrative and judicial decisions support the research in the importance of involving both teachers and parents in the selection of paraprofessionals (Chopra & French, 2004; French, 2001;

Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Springate & Stegelin, 1999). Teacher-parent consensus on this matter may contribute to highly effective paraprofessional services (Etscheidt, 2005).

Legal analysis shows paraprofessionals are assigned academic, therapeutic and medical roles. There is also evidence to suggest that paraprofessionals are being assigned roles for which they are not qualified. To address this case analysis indicates that school districts must “establish the adequacy of training efforts to student’s benefit from the IEP” (Etscheidt, p.74, 2005).

Further paraprofessionals must not be delegated responsibilities for which they are not qualified (Etscheidt, 2005).

Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals. The majority of cases addressing the responsibilities of paraprofessionals concern the provision of health care services to students with significant medical need (Etscheidt, 2005). As this study is concerned with paraprofessional support to students in an inclusive, elementary school environment, this topic is not of great concern. In summation, paraprofessionals who engage in invasive and other health care roles must be trained in the procedure and supervised by an appropriate medical or health professional. The paraprofessional is not responsible for on-going assessment or evaluation of the quality and effect of health interventions (Etscheidt, 2005).

Appropriate roles for the paraprofessional is well documented within the literature and will be discussed below. Administrative and judicial analysis indicates that duties delegated to paraprofessionals must be supplementary and not supplant special education or related services specified in the IEP. An over-reliance on, or over-extension of, paraprofessional support may result in a denial of FAPE. Paraprofessionals may assist with instruction, data collection, safety, or student health under the supervision of credential, certified professionals (Etscheidt, 2005).

Supervision and Training. The analysis of administrative decisions and case law reveals the need to adequately train paraprofessionals for the assigned duties and the need for

paraprofessionals to be supervised adequately by credentialed, qualified professionals (Etscheidt, 2005). As the number of paraprofessionals increase so does the awareness to address issues concerning the preparation and supervision of paraprofessionals. The legal and ethical responsibility for student instruction remains with the qualified teacher, thus a paraprofessional must work under the direct supervision of the teacher.

In terms of liability, teachers and teacher aides are held to a greater standard of care than is normally required in other personal relationships (Alexander & Alexander, 2001). Teachers and principals are not liable for the negligent acts of a properly appointed and qualified paraprofessional. However, if a teacher or principal assigns duties “for which the aide is not qualified” or that extend beyond the scope of employment, the supervisor may be liable for negligent acts by the aide (Alexander & Alexander, p.575, 2001). All members of the IEP team, as well as the paraprofessional must be aware of safety issues, potential problems, and supervisory issues (Etscheidt, 2005).

Academic Literature

In 1993, 2000, and 2010, reviews of the literature were published on trends in research on the use of paraprofessional supports in public schools (Giangreco, Ederlman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001; Giangreco et al., 2010; Jones & Bender, 1993). The most recent review of the literature shows work across nine topics, six of which were presented in the 2000 review. The topical sections are: (a) hiring and retention of paraprofessionals, (b) training, (c) roles and responsibilities, (d) respect and acknowledgement, (e) interactions of paraprofessionals with students and staff, (f) supervision, (g) students’ perspectives on paraprofessional support, (h) school change, and (i) alternatives to the use of paraprofessionals (2010). This study is primarily interested in training and supervision, but an understanding of past work in the areas of training,

roles and responsibilities, respect and acknowledgement, interactions of paraprofessionals with students and staff, as well as supervision will be important in gaining a holistic awareness of the needs of paraprofessionals in inclusive environments. Therefore, Giangreco's nine topic areas will become the framework for understanding previous research in the field.

Hiring and Retaining Paraprofessionals

Studies suggest that it is a challenge to hire and retain sufficient numbers of qualified paraprofessionals (Giangreco, 2010). Lack of respect, training and administrative support as well as poorly defined job descriptions, low pay and benefits, and limited opportunities for advancement are all reasons for this challenge (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002a; Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003). Those who are attracted to positions as paraprofessionals report common reasons they chose their jobs, including schedule compatibility with family circumstances, the desire to do work that contributes to their communities, and the enjoyment of working with children.

While school administrators report feeling "lucky" when they are able to hire and retain qualified paraprofessionals (Giangreco, 2010); those individuals are also given access to higher paying and higher status jobs both inside and outside the school setting (Giangreco et al., 2002a; Tillery et al., 2003). Undesirable or stressful working conditions also result in paraprofessionals leaving their positions. "Many felt they were asked to perform duties that were unsafe, tasks for which they were untrained, or tasks beyond the reasonable expectations of the job" (Tillery et al., p. 125, 2003). Paraprofessionals assigned to positions working one-on-one with students experienced higher rates of turn over than those assigned to classrooms or programs (Giangreco et al., 2002a).

The hidden financial and educational costs associated with turnover can be great. This includes personnel time devoted to recruiting, screening, interviewing, orienting, and ongoing, job embedded, training (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007). Turnover can have a negative impact on educational programs as well as relationships among team members.

Paraprofessional Training

The availability and access to adequate training for paraprofessionals remains a persistent need (Breton, 2010; Davis, Kotecki, Harvey, & Oliver, 2007; Giangreco et al., 2002a; Griffin-Shirley & Marlock, 2004; Riggs, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Whitaker, 2000). Though many paraprofessional training materials exist, field-test data have been reported in reference to only one set (Giangreco, Backus, Cichosky-Kelly, Sherman, & Mavropoulos, 2003).

Paraprofessionals in this study gained knowledge, perspective, and skills across content areas. The study also validated the importance of the training content and documented that it could be effectively delivered across training formats.

In another example, the ParaMet program provided training and college credit for paraprofessionals in urban settings to capitalize on their community knowledge and connections (Wall, Davis, Crowley, & White, 2005). Ninety percent of the ParaMet trainees were African American, they were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and they had earned a high school diploma or equivalent. This study underscored the contributions and challenges faced by paraprofessionals who reported that they lacked training and who were asked to perform duties beyond their skill level. Despite these challenges, paraprofessionals reported levels of pride in their work and described a strong connection between students of similar backgrounds.

Recent research supports previous claims that paraprofessionals can be effectively trained to undertake a wide range of tasks resulting in positive student outcomes. Examples include

training in embedding teacher-planned instruction (McDonnell, Johnson, Polychronis, & Risen, 2002), facilitating social interaction (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Devlin, 2005; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006) and utilizing social stories (Quilty, 2007). Specific topics on which all paraprofessionals should be trained before they engage in work include: ethical practices for confidential communication about students and disabilities; characteristics of appropriate communications with other members of the education team; effects of disability on a student's life; basic educational terminology regarding students, programs, rules and instructional activities; purpose of programs for students with disabilities; personal cultural biases and differences that effect one's ability to work with others; rules and procedural safeguards regarding the management of student behavior; indicators of abuse and neglect; basic instructional and remedial strategies and materials; common concerns of families and students with disabilities; demands of various learning environments; roles of educational team members in planning an IEP; rights and responsibilities of families and children as they relate to learning needs; basic technologies appropriate to students with disabilities; and rationale for assessment (Carter et al., 2009)

The training needs of paraprofessionals will continue to expand along with innovations in the field education. Expanding use of assistive technology, autism related supports, and the need for paraprofessionals to facilitate social interaction with students are only a few areas where paraprofessionals will need continued training (Etscheidt, 2005). As it stands, on-the-job training for paraprofessionals is the norm in most states (Carroll, 2001).

Paraprofessional Roles and Responsibilities

Research continues to support the findings that paraprofessional responsibilities have become increasingly instructional (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Disagreement continues regarding

the appropriate roles of paraprofessionals, especially in the following key areas: (a) the extent and nature of instruction (primary v. supplemental), (b) planning and adapting educational activities, (c) role in assessment, (d) communication and liaison with parents, and (e) clerical duties (Chopra et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2007; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001; Giangreco et al., 2002a; Giangreco, Ederlman, et al., 2001; Minondo, Meyer, & Xin, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Werts, Harris, Tillery, & Roark, 2004).

In many cases there exists a confusion of theoretical and practical roles of the paraprofessional. While it is commonly accepted that general and special teachers are responsible for planning the instruction to be carried out by the paraprofessional, there continues to be documented instances of paraprofessionals operating with a much greater level of autonomy. Paraprofessionals are documented making instructional decisions, providing the bulk of instruction to some students, and doing so without adequate professional direction (French, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). These situations reportedly occur more frequently in situations where students with low incidence disabilities are receiving one-on-one paraprofessional supports (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Werts et al., 2004).

The importance of role clarity and boundaries for paraprofessionals and teachers continues to be supported within the literature. Examples include interactions with parents and student instruction (Chopra & French, 2004; Chopra et al., 2004; Minondo et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Having appropriately delineated roles ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate access to highly qualified general and special education teachers. A lack of role clarity has been linked to increased problems related to limited paraprofessional training (Wall et al., 2005).

Set against the understanding of the acceptable roles of paraprofessionals, it is important to understand the roles in which a paraprofessional should not function. The National Joint

Committee on Learning Disabilities (1999) published a position paper regarding the use of paraprofessional support for students with learning disabilities. The document suggests that paraprofessionals should not assume sole responsibility for instruction or provision of services; serve as a substitute for qualified professionals in meetings, documents or communications; write or modify instructional plans; or disclose educational, clinical, or confidential information unless designated by the qualified professional. Pickett et al. (2003) extends this list to include diagnosing learner needs, planning individualized/personalized programs, aligning curriculum with instructional strategies, planning lessons, and assessing learning outcomes.

Respect and Acknowledgement of Paraprofessionals

This issue has been discussed in the literature for a number of years, but until recently studies exploring the notion had not been completed. Recently three descriptive studies directly address the topic of respect and acknowledgement (Chopra et al., 2004; Giangreco, Ederlman, et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Riggs and Mueller site that despite the articulation from school personnel regarding the value of those serving as paraprofessionals many paraprofessionals report feeling neither respected nor valued as members of the school community (2001). Paraprofessionals report being under, over, or improperly utilized, as well as issues related to compensation, as the root of these frustrations.

Chopra and colleagues conducted focus groups examining the roles of paraprofessionals as “connectors” among and between students, parents, teachers, and community service providers. Participants stated that being respected and valued as members of the school team was a critical component related to their ability to effectively engage in this work (Chopra et al., 2004). Many participants reported that parents demonstrated a high level of respect for their

role. Some paraprofessionals did report that they felt respected and valued by teachers and administrators in their schools.

Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer point out that paraprofessionals link respect and job satisfaction (2001). Their findings offer six related themes and highlight the strong desire by paraprofessionals to feel valued: (a) nonmonetary signs of appreciation, (b) compensation, (c) being trusted with important responsibilities, (d) instructional responsibilities, (e) the need to be listened to, and (f) orientation and support. The study highlights the complexities of establishing a match between the skills of the paraprofessional, the expected role, and the importance of instructional support and non-instructional duties.

Interactions of Paraprofessionals with Students and Staff

Early research suggests that paraprofessional proximity can interfere with peer interactions (Giangreco et al., 2010). Conflicting studies are present on this topic. Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis (2006) note that paraprofessional proximity limited the number of interactions between a student with emotional and behavioral disorders and his peers. Wertz, Zigmond, and Leeper (2001) suggest that proximity had a positive impact on academic engagement, concluding that the closer the paraprofessional was to the children, the more likely the students were to be engaged in the lesson. The author's note in this study that the three participants were accustomed to receiving prompts for engagement from the paraprofessionals and when that typical support was moved away the students became less engaged.

It has been documented that general education teachers tend to be more engaged with their students with disabilities when paraprofessionals were assigned to the classroom instead of placed with an individual student (Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001). Teachers were also more likely to provide supervision, training and support and work collaboratively with classroom-

based paraprofessionals. Considered together current research suggests the need to establish collaborative relationships with paraprofessionals to insure that their interactions are consistent with system-wide efforts to support teachers and students (Giangreco et al., 2010). This issue also establishes the need for paraprofessionals to receive training on strategies to facilitate social interaction with teachers and peers (Etscheidt, 2005)

Supervision and Directing the Work of Paraprofessionals

Research beginning in the 1990s consistently highlights inadequacies in paraprofessional supervision (Giangreco et al., 2010). Most special educators report that they expected to direct the work of paraprofessionals, yet indicated they receive little training to do so and rely on on-the-job experience (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). This may explain why many teachers provide supervision that often does not align with effective practice (French, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001). French documented that the majority of teachers she studied reported that no one engaged in planning for the paraprofessional, and among those who did, most communicated those plans orally. French indicated concern that paraprofessionals who typically lack training, “may be working without direction or with hastily constructed or easily misconstrued oral directions” (p. 51). Services delivered using this approach raise serious questions. Time is also a limiting factor; Giangreco and Broer (2005) reported that special educators in their sample devoted only 2% of their time to each paraprofessional they supervised.

In a 2010 survey of paraprofessionals working in the state of Maine, Breton notes that 39.5% of the participants stated they had never participated in a performance evaluation, which is constant with other findings (Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Azharias, 2001; Wallace, 2003). In addition to formal supervision and evaluation, special education paraprofessionals must be guided in the instruction of students with disabilities. In the same study, Benton reports that

39.5% of the respondents had direct interaction with special education teachers less than once a week, and 15.9% reported never receiving consultation on the direct instruction of students from their special education teacher (2010).

Student's Perspective on Paraprofessional Support

Research concerning the perspective of students who have been assigned paraprofessional support is lacking. Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco completed a qualitative study that explicitly targeted the perceptions of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional support (2005). The findings describe four related themes to the role of the paraprofessional as viewed by the participants, which range from mother, friend, protector from bullying, and primary teacher. The authors suggest that each theme highlights a lack of connectedness by the students with intellectual disabilities to general education teachers and peers. Implications from this study include encouraging schools to (a) consider the social validity of supports, (b) increase teacher engagement, (c) listen to students with disabilities, and (d) include students in making decisions about their own support.

Paraprofessional as Part of School Change

Giangreco and colleagues completed a pilot study and more extensive follow-up study with 46 schools across 13 states concerning the effective utilization of paraprofessionals in a manner that allows for self-assessment, prioritization, and action planning at the individual school level (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002b; Giangreco, Edelman, et al., 2003). In their study, stakeholder teams, made up of teachers, special educators, administrators, parents, and paraprofessionals, field-tested the planning tool, *A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports*. The implementation of the schools action plans based on this tool

served as a catalyst for change and had a positive impact on a number of outcomes for adults and students, including: (a) paraprofessionals knowing their jobs better, (b) improved paraprofessional morale, (c) increased awareness of paraprofessional's value, (d) paraprofessionals knowing students better, (e) retention of paraprofessionals, (f) improved delivery and instruction, and (g) improved home-school collaboration. Also linked to plan implementation were improved student outcomes in the areas of achievement, inclusion, behavior, safety and increased peer interactions.

Alternatives to the use of Paraprofessionals

As discussed earlier, multiple streams of evidence suggest detrimental effects of excessive or ill-conceived paraprofessional support. Carter, Cushing, Clark and Kennedy present the results of a single-subject study utilizing peer support rather than that of a paraprofessional (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005). Their research suggests that positive academic and social outcomes were enhanced when the target student with a disability was paired with two peers rather than one. Giangreco and Broer (2005 and 2007) report that school personnel need to better understand the use of paraprofessionals to make better decisions about alternative supports, and have field tested a screening tool for schools to use in this process.

Summary

In summary, it is difficult to hire and retain paraprofessionals. Among the obstacles faced in this process is a lack of training and administrative support. Turnover of paraprofessionals is costly and has negative impacts on service delivery. Training is divided into two types: (a) training related to specific tasks, and (b) global training which includes not only training necessary to prepare the paraprofessional for work, but also membership in the school

community. The work of paraprofessionals is becoming more related to the delivery of instruction and less connected to the work of the special education teacher. A great deal of debate and concern surrounds this increase in autonomy of the paraprofessional. Whether or not paraprofessionals feel respected and acknowledged for their roles in schools appears to relate to what they report in terms of job satisfaction. Research points to the fact that teachers do not feel qualified to supervise paraprofessionals and that in most cases very little planning, or forethought, is put into the supervision process.

The three frames, historical, legal, and empirical, considered in this review of the literature provide the theoretical framework that will guide data collection (see Chapter 4) and analyses of the evidence (see Chapter 5). From the literature, two theories, or propositions, become clear. First, from the historical and legal review, paraprofessional work provides needed support towards making social and academic inclusion possible and effective when paraprofessionals are properly trained and supervised. A review of empirical evidence suggests a rival theory, however. This states that paraprofessional work does not provide the needed social and academic support for successful inclusion and moreover, hinders social and academic inclusion because paraprofessional work is poorly defined, training is limited, and teachers are not prepared to provide necessary supervision.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A case study, as a method of inquiry, allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of a real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2009). The aim of this type of inquiry is to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth, and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Further, the case study copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points. It relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion. The case study demands a thorough understanding of previous works towards the development of theoretical propositions to guide the data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to understand the paraprofessional work, training, and supervision in inclusive elementary schools through the constructs of the key players involved in the process of training and supervision. Toward that end, Robert K. Yin's (2009) Case Study Method (CSM) will be utilized in this study. It is an appropriate method of inquiry for this purpose, that is, for developing an understanding of the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training, and supervision from the perspective of key players in the paraprofessional training and supervision process—paraprofessionals themselves, general education teachers in whose classroom they work, special education teachers who deploy and manage them, and building principals in the case schools.

Case Study Design

Explicit attention to the design of the inquiry is an important element in case study research. A clearly designed study helps to insure a more systematic research process. Three

steps provide a framework for the early design work; they include: (a) defining the case, (b) selecting one of four types of case study design, and (c) deciding how theory will relate to the design work (Yin, 2012).

Site Selection: Defining the Case

This research will use a single-case design with two embedded units of analysis—that is, a school district, the case, and two of its elementary schools, the units of analysis. Yin articulates five site selection purposes, including selecting: (a) a critical case, (b) an extreme or unique case, (c) a representative or typical case, (d) a revelatory case, and (e) a longitudinal case. Given the goal of understanding paraprofessional work, training, and supervision in inclusive elementary schools, the researcher will use a combination of critical, extreme, and convenience (Patton, 1980, 2002) sampling to select an accessible, academically successful school district with established policies for, and a record of, effectiveness in paraprofessional-supported, inclusive special education programming. Within this district, the researcher will then select two academically successful elementary schools with similar records of paraprofessional-supported inclusive special education programming. The value of such a site selection plan is twofold: first, it promotes understanding of the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training, and supervision by considering an established paraprofessional program operating under relatively good conditions; second, studying an established paraprofessional program permits logical generalization to other less ideally situated cases (Patton, 1980, 2002). Although studying less well-established and situated paraprofessional programs would provide more insight into the nature and effects of a range of debilitating factors, it would neither promote understanding of paraprofessional work itself nor permit logical generalization to more ideally situated cases. Given these sampling considerations, suburban school districts and schools have the greatest

likelihood of having well established and situated paraprofessional programs, as they are more effective than urban and rural districts generally and in the organization and implementation of special education services (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011).

Design

Next the researcher must decide between a single- and multiple-case design. Yin (2009) argues that the multiple-case design offers the researcher the ability to draw stronger conclusions by comparing multiple cases with similarities and differences. From these comparisons stronger evidence can be presented. Yin also cautions that the multiple-case design is expensive, time consuming, and often out of reach for investigators working alone without support. With both the single- and multiple-case design, however, there is the possibility of “embedded units of analysis” (Yin, p. 46, 2009). A single-case design with embedded, or multiple, units of analysis provides the best option for this study. Multiple units, schools within a single district, will make it possible for the researcher to compare paraprofessional work, training, and supervision across two schools following the same district-level paraprofessional program and associated policies. The comparison of different school-level implementation will extend and strengthen conclusions drawn about paraprofessional work, training, and supervision in the single-case district while providing a manageable task for a solo researcher without external support.

Theoretical Propositions

Another step in establishing a case study design involves deciding whether or not to use theoretical propositions to guide and refine the design, including selection of the case(s) and units of analysis, development of research questions, and specification of relevant data to be collected (Yin, 2012). Yin warns that, “theoretical propositions should by no means be

considered with the formality of grand theory in social science but mainly need to suggest a simple set of relationships” (Yin, 2012, p. 9). Yin goes on to suggest that researchers with less experience use theoretical propositions to guide their studies because such perspectives guard against false starts and loss of time, and provide a stronger case for the findings of the study. The literature considered above provides an empirical basis for designing the case study, a guide to selecting the case and units of analysis, as noted above, as well as to guide the collection and analysis of data related to the work, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals, as described in the following sections.

Further, two notions established in current research will guide data collection. First, paraprofessional work provides needed support towards making social and academic inclusion possible and effective when paraprofessionals are properly trained and supervised. Also important to this study is the rival notion, which states that paraprofessional work does not provided the needed social and academic support for successful inclusion and moreover, hinders social and academic inclusion because paraprofessional work is poorly defined, training is limited, and teachers are not prepared to provided necessary supervision.

Case Selection

Six such suburban school districts are contained within a single county in an area accessible to the researcher. Utilizing the state department of education website, information concerning the total enrollment, total special education student enrollment, total number of special education teachers, total number of paraprofessionals, and number of elementary special education teachers was collected and is reported in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 District Enrollment and Special Education Professionals					
District	Total Enrollment	Sp. Ed. Students	Sp. Ed. Teachers	Paraprofessionals	Elm. Sp. Ed. Teachers

1	27,876	2,674	228.5	288	107
2	27,358	3,154	241.0	399.8	142.4
3	21,435	1933	228	274.6	111.7
4	6,668	472	50.3	59.1	24.1
5	5,042	639	53.1	92.9	29.9
6	3608	337	18.3	36	7.6

From these data, calculations were made to determine the rate of identification of special education students and the ratios of special education students to special education teacher, paraprofessionals to special education teacher, and special education students to paraprofessional (see Table 3.2).

District	Rate of Identification	Sped Student/Teacher	Para/Sped Teacher	Sped Student/Para
1	9.59%	11.7	1.26	9.28
2	11.53%	13.1	1.66	7.89
3	9.02%	8.5	1.20	7.04
4	7.08%	9.4	1.17	7.99
5	12.67%	12.0	1.75	6.88
6	9.34%	18.4	1.97	9.36
Average	9.87%	12.18	1.50	8.07

The first three school districts present issues related to total size and access. When considering the smaller three districts, District 4 seemed to present the best case. The district's rate of identification is small, indicating that there is less danger of over-identification of students (McNulty-Eitle, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Skrtic & McCall, 2010). Finally the district's ratio of paraprofessionals to special education teachers is also low, indicating that paraprofessionals are not over utilized (Giangreco, Ederlman, et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2010). Using the criterion of rate or ratio below the average for all districts for all four factors, Districts 3 and 4 are eligible cases.

To date the Department of Education in the state where the research will be conducted does not report student performance data aggregated by disability. Table 3.3, see below, reports elementary level student performance in the area of reading, math, and science as reported by the

state. Grade levels 3, 4 and 5 are listed as these scores present students in the elementary setting, which is the focus of the study. Data is presented as the percentage of students scoring at proficient or above on 2010-2011 state testing.

District	Rdg 3 rd grade	Rdg 4 th grade	Rdg 5 th grade	Math 3 rd grade	Math 4 th grade	Math 5 th grade	Science 4 th grade
1	85.7	89.0	88.9	88.5	89.6	89.8	94.5
2	91.2	94.2	92.5	93.7	92.8	93.4	96.4
3	96.1	97.5	96.9	97.3	97.7	97.2	98.9
4	89.7	92.7	93.9	95.1	89.4	90.9	95.9
5	96.1	96.2	91.8	96.1	96.2	95.3	99.2
6	89.1	94.4	87	95.2	88.8	87.7	98.8
Average	91.3	94	91.8	94.3	92.4	92.4	97.3

District 4 falls slightly below the average in 3rd grade reading, 4th grade reading, 4th grade math, 5th grade math, and 4th grade science, but above the state goals for performance in reading (86% proficient or better) and math (82.3% proficient or better). Based on these factors, and access to the district, District 4 was selected as the case in this study.

Imbedded Units

Once the school district was identified as the case, permission to conduct research within the district was sought and approved (see Appendix A). Each elementary school in the district met the basic qualifications regarding performance. The district’s director of special education contacted elementary buildings and identified two buildings to serve as the imbedded units in the study. Involvement was voluntary, at the discretion of the building administrator. Once Building A and B were selected, a staff member, common to both school buildings, forwarded emails asking for participants from the general education, special education and paraprofessional teaching staff. Through the data collection process, other professionals were identified as critical to the understanding of the nature and effects of training and supervision to paraprofessionals.

Study Participants

In addition to the district's special education director, and principals from Buildings A and B, thirteen professionals volunteered to provide data through open-ended interviews. From building A, two special education teacher, one general education teacher and two paraprofessionals volunteered. From Building B, one special education teacher, one general education teacher, and two paraprofessionals volunteered. Additionally, a school psychologist, a special education coordinator and two district paraprofessional trainers were identified and interviewed.

Informed Consent

Informed consent for all participants was obtained at the start of each interview or observation using an informed consent statement approved by the University of Kansas Human Subjects Committee (HSC) (see Appendix B). Once presented with the approved informed consent statement, the participants were given the opportunity to read the statement and raise and questions or concerns regarding the purpose or nature of the study. The participants were asked to indicate their consent in the research by signing the consent form. To protect anonymity all participants and agencies were given pseudonyms.

Data Collection

The researcher utilized the data collection techniques of open-ended or, non-structured, interviews, and document review in this study. The primary source of data collection in this study was direct observation from open-ended interviews, also known as non-structured interviews (Yin, 2012). Interviews of this type provide a more rich and extensive material than

data collected from surveys (Yin, 2012). Open-ended interviews are less structured and can assume a lengthy conversation mode not usually found in surveys (Yin, 2012). This flexibility allows the researcher to understand how case study participants construct reality and think about situations, not just to provide the answers to the researcher's specific questions. Not to be confused with other types of research, in the Case Study, the open-ended interview pursues a consistent line of inquiry, but the actual stream of questions is likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Yin, 2009).

Protocol

Interview protocols were established for each type of interview, including administrator, teacher and paraprofessional. These protocols served as a guide for each interview and were grounded in the historical, legal and empirical literature presented in Chapter 2. They included specific questions and topics identified in the literature to be considered with each participant. Interview protocols can be found in Appendix C.

Elite interviews (Yin, 2012) were conducted with administrators at the district and school level. In addition to a single central office administrator, the principal from each unit of analysis, or school building, was interviewed. In addition to paraprofessionals, regular and special education teachers who supervise or work with them were interviewed. It was the intention of the research to conduct a separate interview with each respondent, but in two situations a group interview was conducted. First the principal from Building B and the school psychologist from both buildings were interviewed together. Second, both district paraprofessional trainers were interviewed in one meeting. Extensive field notes were taken during each interview, were digitally recorded as well. The digital recordings were transcribed into a printed transcript for analysis.

Additional documents and records were presented during the interview process and they were considered as archival records or documents for analysis. The documents were coded for review and used to triangulate the information provided by multiple respondents during the interview process. These documents were provided by the special education director and the district paraprofessional trainers and serve as a record of training sessions and contain the content of these trainings. A list of these documents can be accessed in Appendix D.

Data collection from open-ended interviews and document review, was triangulated in order to establish converging lines of evidence, which made the findings as robust as possible (Yin, 2012). The most desired convergences occur with three or more sources all pointing to the same set of events, facts, or interpretations (Yin, 2012). It was expected that utilizing three interviewee types, as well as direct observation and document analysis across two units of analysis would provide ample information for triangulation purposes.

Recording Modes

Data collection through interviews and observations were recorded using handwritten notes and digital recordings of the interviews. The digital recordings were transcribed and subsequently edited for typographical errors and exclusions. In addition the researcher maintained a journal throughout the study. Within this journal, notes regarding each interview were recorded and used to supplement the verbal content of the interviews during transcription and data analysis. Also, contained in these notes were lists of recorded documents, contact information for each participant, schedules and meeting locales for each interview, and topics which required unplanned exploration in future interviews.

Analysis

It is necessary for quality case study research not to mingle evidence and interpretation (Yin, 2012). This can be avoided with the use of a case study database that is created in a manner allowing “readers to judge independently your later interpretation of the data” (Yin, 2012, p. 15). This formal database is constructed from the work files created during the data collection phase and provides a critical reader means of inspecting the raw data in order to judge the conclusions presented in the case study (Yin, 2009).

Unlike other research methods, case study analysis does not follow a routine set of procedures. The researcher must be the one who defines the codes to be used when organizing data and for developing the procedures for logically piecing evidence into broader themes (Yin, 2012). This can begin to take shape through the organization of data into hierarchical relationships, matrices, or other arrays (Yin, 2012). Multiple analytical techniques are then considered, including, (a) pattern matching, (b) explanation building, (c) time-series analysis, and (d) replication logic. Through pattern matching, the researcher stipulates a pattern of expected findings at the onset of the case study, and later compares the empirically based pattern with the predicted one (Yin, 2012). If the researcher begins with an open-ended question, explanation building may be employed as a means of building a case for the question’s answer (Yin, 2012). Time-series analysis is done in case studies which seek to develop a timeline for a series of events or patterns and may hint at causal relationships (Yin, 2012). Finally, replication logic seeks to interpret findings across multiple cases (Yin, 2012). In this study the two embedded units will provide the ability to engage in this type of analysis, and all but time-series analysis will be utilized.

Two motives are behind the researcher’s questions considered in this study. First, concerning the questions of how paraprofessionals are training and supervised, the point is to address these questions in a straightforward manner, within the context of the theoretical

propositions presented earlier. This first phase of data analysis, pattern matching, requires reflection on data concerning the specific type of training and supervision provided, relative to the notion that training is either implemented with great forethought in a broader system, or is carried out with less forethought as needs arise within the school. The second type of analysis, explanation-building, concerns the third research question regarding how paraprofessional training and supervision is perceived by administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals. From this more open-ended question the researcher seeks to build an explanation for how supervision and training is conducted within the embedded units of analyses.

It is also important to note in case study research that the underlying assumptions implicit at the beginning stages of research may change as data are collected (Yin, 2012). These changes may result in revisions in the initial plan. This is not an argument against starting with a strong plan. It is better to revise the initial plan, even drastically, than begin with no plan at all (Yin, 2012). Finally, replication logic is interpreting the findings across the cases in multiple-case studies (Yin, 2012). Even though this study is based on a single case, the use of multiple embedded units of analysis will allow for the strengthening of findings using this type of analysis.

The researcher is experienced in the “constant comparative” method of data analysis presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which is a modified version of a methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This model, like the Case Study Method, recognizes that data analysis is an ongoing process in which data collection and data analysis are integrated, reciprocal activities rather than discrete, isolated events (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Skrtic, 1985; Yin, 2009). The researcher used this continuous, reciprocal process of data collection and analysis within and across the inquiry process, thereby allowing questions, issues, and categories of information to become progressively more focused as he learned more about the research

problem from the multiple perspectives of the participants. The data collected through open-ended interviews, direct observation and document review were recorded in narrative transcripts. Throughout the inquiry these transcripts and documents were content analyzed to guide subsequent data collections and analysis and ultimately, to write the case report. This constant comparative method involves four operations: unitizing, categorizing, filling in patterns, and case study construction (Skrtic, 1985; Skrtic et al., 1985), and are employed by the researcher as a means of creating the case study database mentioned above.

Unitizing

Unitizing is a process in which interview, observation, and documentary data are divided into “units” of information related to specific aspects of the problem under study (see Appendix E). The units in the present study reflected perspectives, communications, actions, relationships, and processes relevant to various aspect of the nature and effects training and supervision provided to paraprofessionals in the elementary, inclusive setting. Each unit is the smallest piece of information that could be understood by someone with general knowledge of the topics under study but not necessarily of participants' experiences. Each unit was coded with respect to how it was collected and the coded name and type of participant who provided it, as well as with the transcript from which it was drawn (see Appendix F).

Categorizing

Categorizing is the process of sorting units of information into sets of like information, which, in the present study, was done using the modified constant comparison method noted above. The unitizing and categorizing processes began during the data collection phase of the present inquiry (see below), with data gathered in interviews, observations, and documents

identified during interviews. The unitizing/categorizing analytic procedure was the mechanism that permitted the inquirer to identify what was salient to participants relevant to their involvement in the IEP process and to alert him to the additional types and sources of data that were needed to understand these saliencies more fully, ultimately making data collection and analysis, and thus the research itself, progressively more focused over time.

Filling in Patterns

The inquirer used three strategies recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to identify additional types and sources of data needed to fill gaps in his understanding of participants' saliencies. These included (a) “extension” or using known information as a content guide for developing additional interview or observation questions, or as guides in examining documents and records; (b) “bridging” or using several known but apparently disconnected items as points of reference as a guide for further study to identify and understand their connection; and (c) “surfacing” or speculating on information that should have been found, given the logic of the category system, and then identifying participants, observation settings, or documents to establish its existence or nonexistence. By using these strategies, the inquirer was able to continually evaluate what he was learning about the problem under study, identify and fill gaps in his learning, and verify existing information and insights.

Case Study Construction

One outcome of this integrated, reciprocal process of data collection and analysis was the development of a progressively more comprehensive, complete, and integrated category scheme (see Appendix G). The category scheme represented a taxonomy of information for developing and writing the case study report, which itself served both as a mechanism for reporting the data

that were collected and an occasion for further analysis and synthesis of data during the writing process (see Skrtic et al., 1985; Skrtic, 1985). In this sense, the writing of the case study report was another step in the data analysis process (Skrtic, 1985).

The inquirer followed the procedural recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Skrtic et al. (1985) to develop the case study report. That is, first, he coded and indexed all of the data from interview, observation, and documentary sources. Second, he developed a preliminary case report outline based on the purpose of the study, the analysis of the data, and his sense of "what the story line [would] be" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 367), given the logic of the category scheme and its patterns of issues and themes. Finally, the inquirer expedited the writing process by cross-referencing the indexed material to the provisional outline.

Following Skrtic (1985), the inquirer anticipated that the category scheme and the provisional outline would change during the writing of the case report, given that the writing process itself would uncover gaps in information. When gaps in understanding were discovered during the case writing process, the inquirer collected additional information through in-person or phone interviews and/or collection and analysis of additional documents and records.

Analytic Generalizations

Theory development does not only facilitate the data collection phase of a case study. The appropriately developed theory, or conceptual framework, provides for the generalization of findings (Yin, 2009). Unlike statistical generalization, where an inference is made about a population on the basis of empirical data collected about a sample from that population, analytic generalization uses previously developed theory as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study (Yin, 2009). In this study, the theory and rival theory set out in Chapter 2 serves as a set of parameters for understanding findings in the case study. When

two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed. These results may be considered “yet more potent” if two or more cases support the same theory, but do not support an equally plausible, rival theory (Yin, p. 39, 2009). Analytic generalization can be used whether a case study involves a single case or multiple cases (Yin, 2009). Due to limitations cited above, this work consists of a single-case with two embedded units. The two embedded units serve to focus the study, but also allow for the exploration of nuances in implementation at different work sites. These two units of analysis provide for cross-case comparison and a greater understanding of the conceptual framework. While this study will not claim replication, as it is limited to a single case, findings are strengthened through the inclusion of embedded units.

Validation Procedure

Once the case study is constructed, Yin (2009) suggests that the researcher seek feedback not only from peers with specific knowledge of the subject area, but also from case study participants. These processes is more than a professional courtesy in the sense that it allows the researcher to correct errors in fact and anonymity as well as check the overall credibility and quality of interpretations made by the researcher. To this end, the researcher provided a draft copy of the case study report to all sixteen participants. The report was transmitted electronically along with written directions asking the respondents to review the document and comment regarding the overall interpretation of the work and its credibility. Further, directions for reporting errors in fact and anonymity on a provided log sheet were included (see Appendix H). Respondents were given two weeks to complete this review and submit their findings. Eight of the sixteen participants responded; including the district special education director, the school psychologist, a building principal, two special education teachers, two regular education

teachers, and one paraprofessional. While the study achieved complete consensus related to overall credibility, the case study was revised to correct factual errors and interpretive errors; corrections were provided by three participants. A “revision appendix” was developed that listed each revision that was made in the case study as a result of the final member check (see Appendix I).

Trustworthiness

Four tests have commonly been used to establish the quality of any empirical social research. As case studies are a form of such research, the four tests are relevant to case studies. The tests include; construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Construct validity identified the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied. Internal validity, which only applies to explanatory or causal studies, seeks to establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are believed to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships. As this study is descriptive in nature, internal validity is not of concern. External validity defines the domains to which a study’s findings can be generalized. Finally, reliability demonstrates that the operations of a study, such as data collection procedures, can be repeated with the same results (Yin, 2009). Several considerations have been taken throughout the design of this study to insure the trustworthiness. Each will be described below as they align to the three applicable tests.

Construct Validity

Critics of the case study method often point to the fact that a case study investigator fails to develop a sufficiently operationalized set of measures and that subjective judgments are used to collect data (Yin, 2009). Four tactics are available to increase construct validity when doing

case studies and each has been employed here. First the use of multiple sources of evidence to encourage converging lines of data for analysis. Second, establishing that a clear chain of evidence is relevant. The third tactic involves utilizing a proven method of operationalizing data analyses. Finally, ensuring that respondents review the case study in a validation procedure.

Within this study each of the above noted methods are well established. Interviews were conducted with sixteen members of the district staff, across two embedded units. Individuals with similar positions in each unit were interviewed along with those professionals working at the district level. These interviews were considered alongside documents provided by participants. All information was collected, organized, and sorted in a manner, which allows for a clear chain of evidence linking each transcript through the process to the final case study document. This process was enhanced through the utilization of the constant comparative method of content analysis. Finally eight of the sixteen participants completed the validation procedure. Of these eight, one individuals from each professional perspective, district administrator, psychologist, building administrator, general education teacher, special education teacher, and paraprofessional responded.

External Validity

The next test involves knowing whether a study's "findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study" (Yin, p. 43, 2009). The external validity problem has been a major barrier to completing case studies. Critics argue that single cases offer a poor basis for generalization. This criticism is grounded in the notion that generalization should be applied to a larger universe. Whereas in statistical generalizations researchers generalize from a single set and apply the findings to the larger universe, the single case researcher seeks to generalize within an analytical framework. Doing so, the researcher, first, creates a conceptual claim showing how

the study's findings have informed the relationship among a particular set of concepts, theoretical constructs, or sequence of events. Then, the theoretical propositions are applied to other situations, outside the completed case study, where similar concepts, constructs, or sequences might be relevant (Yin, 2009). The ultimate generalization may be presented soundly and resist logical challenge, even though it may not hold the same status as a proof in geometry (Yin, 2012). Ultimately this project seeks to develop analytical generalizations (Yin, 2012), or working hypotheses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2012), regarding the work, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals in inclusive elementary schools and the implementation issues that have been identified in the literature as attending the practice. The expectation is that these analytical generalizations and working hypotheses will be instructive both in the development of future case study research and in designing and implementing paraprofessional programs to support inclusive education.

Reliability

The goal of reliability is to minimize error and bias within a study. If another researcher were to conduct a study following the same procedures described here, with the same case, they should arrive at the same findings and conclusions. It is important to note that in a case study, reliability is not synonymous with replication. Documentation of the procedures of a case study is necessary to meet the demands of reliability. Without such documentation, one could not even repeat their research. Case study researchers must document and follow procedures through the development of a case study protocol and case study database (Yin, 2009). The protocol and database for this study are included above and in Appendices C-G.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS

Introduction to the Context of the Study

Two elementary school buildings (K-5), within a suburban school district in a plains state, were the setting for this research. Although differences between the buildings exist, each utilized paraprofessionals to service students with disabilities in an inclusive model. This case study attempts to provide context regarding the training and supervision provided by the district and buildings to paraprofessionals working in an inclusive setting. The aim of this report is allow the reader to “hear” the voices of these paraprofessionals and other members of the building and district staff, in a sense, relive their experience in and with the process of training and supervision.

The District

The district is one of six school districts in the most populated county in the plains state where the research was conducted. It was selected for consideration based on total student enrollment, rate of paraprofessional employment, student outcomes, and access. The district educates students on twelve campuses, including seven elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. The district encompasses a geographic area of over 100 square miles and serves students from four cities as well as unincorporated areas of the county. In recent years, each school building as achieved Adequate Year Progress and the state’s Standard of Excellence. During the window of data collection the district enrolled 6,668 students, 472 of which were identified and receiving special education services. This district employed 50.3 special education teachers and 59.1 paraprofessionals; 24.1 of the special education teachers were employed in elementary buildings. A professional relationship between the researcher and the Special Education Director for the district, allowed for atypical access to personnel for

research purposes. Once the district was selected, the Special Education Director sought volunteers from the elementary building principals in the district to participate in the study. Two elementary buildings were identified. A school psychologist, who serves both school buildings, assisted the researcher in identifying volunteers to serve as respondents in the interview process.

Building A

Building A is an accredited school building that was opened for the 1998-1999 school year. It is located on the west side of the district and served 445 students, in grades kindergarten through fifth, during the year data was collected. Three special education teachers and seven paraprofessionals served students with disabilities enrolled at Building A. The breakdown of building demographics illustrates 1.57% of students were African American, 30.11% of students were Hispanic, 63.6% of students were White and 4.7% of students were classified as other. The state classifies 57.75% of students as Economically Disadvantaged. Approximately 8% of students qualify for special education services.

Building B

Building B was opened for the 2007-2008 school year. It is located on the east side of the district and served 562 students in grades kindergarten through fifth. During the time of data collection, two special education teacher and four paraprofessionals served students with disabilities enrolled in Building B. The breakdown of building demographics illustrates 4.11% of students were African American, 7.58% of students were Hispanic, 82.68% of students were White and 5.63% of students were classified as other. The state classifies 11.9% of students as Economically Disadvantaged. Approximately 5% of students qualify for special education services.

Respondents

The respondents in this case study were 16 professionals employed by the district at multiple levels within the organizational structure. Elite interviews were conducted with the special education director, a special education coordinator, and two district-wide paraprofessional trainers. A school psychologist who serves both school buildings was interviewed as well. From Building A, interviews were conducted with the principal, two special education teachers, one general education teacher and two paraprofessionals. From Building B, interviews were conducted with the principal, one special education teacher, one general education teacher and two paraprofessionals. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations; including, school buildings, private homes and local cafes. In addition to data collection through interviews, several respondents provided paper documents to support their positions. These documents were reviewed, cataloged and considered alongside interview findings.

Special Education Director

The Special Education Director entered the field of education after a career in the military and taking time off to raise her family. She began working in schools as a volunteer, then as a teacher's aide and finally as a paraprofessional in a self-contained classroom. This work experience led her back to college where she finished degrees in special education and school leadership. After receiving her licensure in special education, she began work as a special education teacher, and then a special education director in multiple school districts.

Special Education Coordinator

The Special Education Coordinator came to the field of education after a career in the business world. She began as a paraprofessional in a self-contained classroom serving fifth and sixth grade students. She then worked as a long-term substitute teacher for one year, before going back to school and earning licensure in special education and school leadership. Since then she has worked as a teacher, consultant, and special education coordinator in multiple school districts. During the time of her interview for this case study, she was preparing to take on a special education directorship in another district.

District Level Trainers

The District Paraprofessional Trainers are a team of two. One member of this team is a paraprofessional who has spent 14 years working with the district, and five years in another district. The second member of this team is an adaptive specialist whose time is divided between providing professional development to special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

School Psychologist

The School Psychologist has worked in this capacity in two school districts. While receiving training in school psychology, she worked as a paraprofessional. At the time of her interview she had completed her first year in the district.

Building A

The principal from Building A had also completed his first year in the district at the time of his interview. He came to the district after being a principal in another school district, and

before that was a general education teacher. In addition to his role in school leadership, he and his wife have published a book on reading interventions.

Two special education teachers and one general education teacher participated in interviews from Building A. The first special education teacher has been in the building for 12 years and before that taught both kindergarten and second grade in other schools. Previous to her work as a teacher she spent five years as a paraprofessional in another. Her master's degree in special education focused on both learning disabilities and. The second special education teacher from Building A has finished 10 years in the building, with three prior years teaching in Nebraska. All of her teacher experience is in special education. The general education teacher from Building A has been teaching for 13 years. All of this experience has been in a 1st grade classroom in Building A.

Two special education paraprofessionals were interviewed from Building A. One of the paraprofessionals is a certified teacher with over 30 years of experience in multiple school districts, including three years teaching general education in the district. When he retired from teaching, he accepted his current position as a paraprofessional in Building A, where he had taught the three previous years. The second paraprofessional from Building A has been with the district for five years, first in a program for middle school students with behavioral concerns, and now at the elementary level. She has an undergraduate degree in biology and had worked in a few jobs before taking time off to raise her family. She was interested in a position as a paraprofessional because she thought it would be fun to work with kids.

Building B

The Principal from Building B came to work in schools after a career in the business world. Her first work in education was as a paraprofessional and library aide. After training in

general education and school leadership she taught, became an assistant principal and finally a principal in her current building.

One special education teacher and one general education teacher were interviewed from Building B. The special education teacher just finished her fourth year in the district. Her most recent two years have been in building B and before that she taught in Building A. She began her career as a special education teacher in January of 1970 and has worked in a number of school districts throughout the state. The general education teacher from Building B has finished four years in the district, three years in Building B and one in a different building. Before coming to the district, she completed seven years of teaching in another school district. She holds a master's degree in special education, but did not complete the requirements for licensure in special education, as she felt she was best capable of serving students with disabilities in a general education classroom.

Two special education paraprofessionals were interviewed from Building B. The first paraprofessional has six years of experience, five in her current building, as well as a bachelor's degree in business and economics. She came to education, after working in the building industry, for multiple reasons. One of which was having the opportunity to work in the building where her children attend school. The second paraprofessional working in Building B has three years of experience with the district, but worked as a school secretary and teacher's aide in another district before shifting her time to family responsibilities. She attended college, but did not complete a degree or certificate.

The Labor Market

Academic research indicates that hiring qualified paraprofessionals can be a significant challenge, but this does not seem to be the case within this district. Nearly all of the respondents

commented that it was not an issue to hire paraprofessionals and that the labor market generated more applications than positions. Those individuals applying for paraprofessional jobs were often over-qualified for the position. Many held college degrees and, in some cases, a teaching license. This fact, coupled with a saturated teacher labor market, led the principal of Building A to put off hiring for open paraprofessional positions into the summer months, with the hopes of hiring licensed teachers who had not found teaching positions. Potential reasons for the ample applicant pool included good insurance benefits, good beginning salaries when compared to the work and the wage in other school districts, and the ability to have a job that corresponded to the schedule of a paraprofessional's children.

There were some respondents who offered a slightly different opinion. While they acknowledged that the labor market provided more than enough qualified applicants, the difference in opinion centered on the notion that while applicants may be qualified on paper, there were still challenges in finding professionals who fit well within the school building and program. Two respondents reflected on situations where paraprofessionals had been hired in recent years, who had interviewed well and looked good on paper, but did not work out. One participant, whose comments were outside of the normal response, indicated that she felt it was hard to hire paraprofessionals as, "they have one of the worst jobs in the building. They are with kids all the time and do not get a break. They don't get paid very much."

Administrators of individual buildings have the responsibility of hiring paraprofessionals. The Human Resources department at the district level places advertisements, but it is left up to the building principal to review applications, conduct interviews and make hiring decisions.

Building Cultures

Based on the level of autonomy each principal has to manage the work of their building, differences became evident, not only in practice, but also in culture. Building A has experienced a great deal of change in the past couple of years, as turnover in leadership has threatened continuity and long term initiatives, because each new administrator brings new ideas and strategies. Further, some people do not like change and so these new ideas and strategies have to be developed over time. During the school year in which this research was conducted, the building experienced a change in leadership, which resulted in a new principal, new special education coordinator and new school psychologist. Additionally they were preparing to hire a new special education coordinator in the coming year, due to the resignation of the current coordinator at the end of the year, so that she could accept a directorship in a different district.

This building serves a student population of approximately 450 students, with a special education identification rate of around 8%, which is lower than the state average, but higher than other buildings in the district. Seven special education paraprofessionals serve students in Building A, working with three special education teachers. The School Psychologist, whose work supports members of the administrative team, and is able to witness differences between Building A and Building B, noted that the building culture has developed greatly under the new principal's leadership and she anticipates that the culture will continue to emerge in the coming years. Collaboration between general education and special education teachers in Building A happens during Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings; the special education teachers attends these meetings for each grade level he or she serves, as time allows.

Building B serves approximately 464 students, with a special education identification rate of around 5%. In the coming year, they are planning for between 24 and 26 students being served in an inclusive environment, by three special education teachers and four

paraprofessionals. The current building principal, opened the building five years ago. When the building was opened the principal was allowed to staff the building with in-district transfers, meaning she was able to recruit the best teachers from other buildings to join her staff.

This resulted in a much different building culture, which can be seen throughout the building five years later. When asked about the building culture and the driving force behind it, every participant from Building B responded that the principal was responsible for the culture, and that it presented a huge benefit compared to their other professional experiences. This culture centers on the notion that all members of the school community serve as teachers and that everyone is a part of one family.

When discussing building culture, a general education teacher reflected on an instance when the special education teachers celebrated Paraprofessional Appreciation Week. The celebration was concocted after Teacher Appreciation Week. The district did not support the process of celebrating a week for paraprofessionals, but the special education teachers decided it was necessary and the entire building supported the paraprofessionals, as they had the teachers a week earlier. Each student, regardless of whether or not they were served through IDEA, participated in recognizing the impact paraprofessionals had had on them. This teacher believed this time of celebration could only have happened because of the building's unique culture.

Paraprofessionals, in Building B, have time each morning to meet with the special education teachers for collaboration, but that time does not meet all of the needs the pair has in serving students. Additionally, one paraprofessional commented that at times she tries very hard not to disturb the special education teacher during this time, but it is a good time to talk and plan. Additionally, the general and special education teachers have time each week to collaborate. The general education teacher views this process as an essential activity.

Buildings A and B both operate on the Collaboration Teacher model for the inclusion of students receiving special education services. Under this system, one or two teachers from each grade level is identified as a collaboration teacher and all students served through special education at the grade level are placed in her classroom. With identification rates lower than 8% this can be done without violating the Principal of Natural Proportions. This process results in more consistency in collaboration and supervision as the special education teachers and paraprofessionals are working with only one or two teachers at each grade level. General education teachers are given choice as to whether or not they would like to be considered for the role of collaboration teacher.

Professional Role of the Paraprofessionals

The first paraprofessional from Building A spends about half of his time pulling kids out of general education classrooms for interventions and the other half supporting students in the general education classroom. He also spends one half hour supervising in the lunchroom. During the time he is pulling students out for services, he works with first and fourth grade reading groups of one to three students, and an additional 30-minute block to meet the IEP goals for a group of fourth graders. The rest of his time working with students is spent supporting students in a general education classroom. He indicated that aspects of the schedule could shift on a weekly basis.

The special education teacher who supervised his work developed the instruction he provided to the students. As the school year went on, this direction became less and less. At the end, she would provide him with the lessons to deliver, but would not walk him through each step of the lesson, as she had previously. As this independence developed, the special education teacher made sure he had time to work through the lesson and prepare to deliver the instruction.

He was capable of performing at this level of independence because of his skill set as an experienced classroom teacher. When his work included supporting students in the general education setting, he knew which kids in the room needed support and what aspect of their academic work required support, specifically an awareness of the IEP goals for each student. He also reported working to support all of the students in the class and not simply focusing on the students with disabilities.

The second paraprofessional from Building A reported similar daily activities. Each morning when she arrived at school she reviewed the lesson plans she would be working with during the day, so she had a notion of what she would be doing. She was assigned to car loop duty before school, after which her day with students began in first grade. She taught reading lessons in a small group setting, utilizing materials designed by her supervising special education teacher. The rest of her day, save her time supervising the lunchroom, was spent with the fourth grade. She reported going into the fourth grade classroom for reading lessons, to support the teacher's whole group instruction. She worked in this manner for math instruction, as well. She also pulled fourth graders out of class for small group work in the Discovery Room (DR). The Discovery Room is a term used in both Building A and B in reference to a special education resource room. The paraprofessional commented that she did small group instruction with between one and three students. When providing group instruction in the DR, she always worked from lesson plans developed by the special education teacher. Like the other paraprofessionals from Building A when working to support students in the general education classroom, she indicated it was important to work with all of the kids and not just the students who were being served through special education.

In Building B, the paraprofessionals reported similar activities, with some small differences. The first paraprofessional indicated that her daily structure is set, but that the

activities within the day are always changing. She knows which classroom she is assigned to and goes there to see what they are doing for the day. The first task is to decide where a student will receive their instruction based on the daily activities. Is there a lesson the student should participate in directly, should there be follow-up, individually, in the general education classroom, or should the student receive specialized instruction away from the classroom? Two thirds of her day is spent in the general education classroom of the general education teacher from Building B who participated in the interview process. The two worked together to make this decision about service delivery, but the paraprofessional commented that the general education teacher had a great deal of trust in her to make those decisions. If the decision was made to pull the child out for instruction, the paraprofessional and a single student or a small group, up to about 3, would utilize a small work room adjacent to the classroom and work through the lessons the whole group was completing during the same time. At times, the lessons would be different from what the class was doing. For example, if it was a math lesson and the student's skills were behind that of the class concept, they might work on an alternate concept. Lesson designing for this process came from the general education teacher and the curriculum materials utilized in the classroom.

If the paraprofessional remained in the classroom to work with students, she would pay attention to what was happening and make sure that students were engaged and following along. She focused on helping the students achieve as much independence as possible and tried not to hover over students, but instead observe, and if she noticed they were experiencing difficulty, she would step in and assist. Like the paraprofessional from Building A, she expressed that she helped all of the students, not just those receiving special education services. In addition to the time in the general education classroom, she had one hour of duty each day, supervising lunch and the car loop. Additionally, from time to time, she might be scheduled to work with a student

in the DR for a period of time. This time was spent in 30-minute blocks providing intensive instruction to students. The supervising special education teacher always designed academic lessons provided during this time, although that teacher might not always be in the DR when the paraprofessional was providing services.

The second paraprofessional from Building B worked in the kindergarten class in the morning, and then with first and third grade in the afternoon. Her supervision duties included bus duty, car loop and lunchroom duties. In the morning, she worked directly with one student in the kindergarten classroom. For academic activities she supported him within the general education classroom, but for behavioral issues, she often had to remove him from the class. When in the classroom, she worked to intermingle with the whole class, so she was not focused on a single student all of the time. Lesson design, for these activities, always came from the general education teacher and supervising special education teacher. When providing services to the first and third grade learners, the model was similar. At times, she was in the classroom and other times she pulled students out for instruction. She also attended specials with the first grade class to monitor the behavior of three students. She also supported the third grade students during their reading time through pull out services.

Training

The district utilizes a multi-level training model to orient, train and provide professional development to paraprofessionals working in inclusive elementary classrooms. A district-wide program exists for the initial and ongoing training of all paraprofessionals. Building level activities are provided through weekly staff meetings, implemented differently in the two buildings included in this study, and varying means of ‘as-needed’ training are provided on topics that cannot be anticipated. Paraprofessionals follow the model established in the state

funding guidelines as to the minimum hours of training they participate in each year.

Paraprofessionals in the position for less than three years are required to have a minimum of 20 hours of staff development each year. Paraprofessionals in the position, consecutive and current, for more than three years are required to have a minimum of 10 hours of staff development each year. Finally, paraprofessionals who hold a teachers' license are required to have a minimum of 8 hours of in-service each year. Also considered in this section are the topics of training provided to paraprofessionals from the perspective of the district trainers and the paraprofessionals. Finally, the perception of the training process from each respondent is considered.

District-Wide Training

District-wide training activities are developed and implemented by a team of two, who fill this role along with other professional responsibilities. One member of this team is a paraprofessional who has spent 14 years working with the district and five years in another district. Approximately five years of this time was spent in the technology department. This role expanded into expertise in assistive technology and more involvement with the implementation of services to students with disabilities. At some point, her role began to also include paraprofessional support and finally a former special education director expanded her role into paraprofessional development. Currently this role includes managing the pool of substitute paraprofessionals, providing both professional support and professional development, maintaining compliance protocols for paraprofessional training hours, and working directly as a paraprofessional in a post-secondary center for students engaged in life and employment skill development. As her role increased, her title was expanded to Lead Paraprofessional for the district.

The Special Education Director, conveyed that it was important to have a paraprofessional in this role and that this particular team member was successful in large part because of the respect other paraprofessionals have for her and her experience as a full-time paraprofessional. The trainer estimated that about 30% of her time is spent developing and implementing paraprofessional training activities. In addition, special education coordinators often request that she check in on paraprofessionals from time to time, by visiting a school building, to help manage training issues or help support paraprofessionals.

The second member of this team is an adaptive specialist whose time is divided between providing professional development to special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Her role as a trainer of paraprofessionals began when a former staff member resigned at the beginning of a school year and she was asked to take on the role. This trainer estimated that between 10% and 20% of her time is involved in this process of training and supporting paraprofessionals. The pair co-plans all of the trainings they offer, as well as the district wide orientation at the beginning of the year. They also communicate at least weekly, and she is able to help support paraprofessionals during her time working directly in the school buildings.

The services provided to paraprofessionals have expanded over time in the district through the work of multiple special education directors. Both district trainers report that there is a deep commitment to paraprofessional training from the central office. Over time the programming has developed to increase the number and type of in-service opportunities provided to paraprofessionals. The pair suggests one of the barriers to expanding these training opportunities is the limited time their schedules allow to develop and implement the training sessions. They believe that if they did not utilize non-paid, personal time, they would not be able to maintain the current training protocols.

At the beginning of each school year, a new paraprofessional training is utilized to orient new employees to the district and provide training to those continuing in the professional role. This training is aimed at providing orientation to the district's policies and procedures as well as topics related to the work of paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals are divided into groups based on the level of the school building they are assigned, with the realization that training needs differ between elementary and secondary programs. Rules related to confidentiality are always included in this workshop.

In the past years, there have been multiple sessions some using a video/discussion format, and paraprofessionals have had options in which activities they attended. New paraprofessionals are separated during parts of this in-service day. Some years the district has had 15 to 20 new individuals in this role and the trainers believe the newly hired staff feel more comfortable in smaller groups for orientation activities. The district Special Education Director feels that it is important that someone in her position attends new paraprofessional trainings and be as involved as possible. She also expressed the desire to expand this beginning of the year training to include a "new paraprofessional academy," which would provide greater time and focus for training designed to meet the needs of paraprofessionals new to the profession and new to the district.

In addition to the beginning of the year training, the co-coordinators interface with special education coordinators, and building level personnel to develop training opportunities for paraprofessionals as they earn the requisite number of annual training hours. These opportunities vary and include online training application, face-to-face training, and video presentations. Other professionals in the district with expertise in certain areas are utilized as trainers as needs arise. Not all paraprofessionals attend every training opportunity and choice exists regarding which topics are most applicable to their position in the district.

In previous years, paraprofessionals have always been off duty on days in which students did not attend school. During the 2011-2012 school year, there was a shift in this practice to include professional development days for paraprofessionals on days typically reserved for teacher professional development. Also during the 2011-2012 year, the district ended the school year three days early. One and a half days of this time was used for paraprofessional development.

Building Level Training

Running parallel to this district training model are opportunities within the school building where the paraprofessionals work. Over the past three years, Building A has moved to expand the typical staff meeting into a program called Collective Inquiry (CI). The premise is that the day-to-day routine topics found in a typical staff meeting can be handled over electronic communications and face-to-face time should be used for community learning. Topics covered during these CI meetings, which occur on Friday mornings, include information regarding the switch to Common Core, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, lesson plan development, interventions for students with traumatic brain injuries, technology interventions, and other information related to current building or district initiatives.

In Building A, the principal has established the expectation that paraprofessionals attend these weekly CI meetings alongside the general and special education teachers. If a paraprofessional has the responsibility of morning duty, they are free to leave the meeting. Additionally, when the morning's topic does not pertain to the special education paraprofessional, the principal excuses them from the responsibility of attending the meeting. It was noted that there were times when paraprofessionals attended the CI meeting even when they were not expected to because they had a desire to learn the information and be involved in the

meeting. Paraprofessional perception in Building A is mixed. They recognized the importance of hearing the information and doing so alongside the general and special education teachers, but also felt some of the information did not pertain to them. Overall, they felt there was value in the process and had the desire to continue to attend.

Across the district, in Building B, the expectation regarding paraprofessional attendance at weekly meetings is different. The term Collective Inquiry is not used, but a Friday morning staff meeting is in place. The building principal has set the expectation that paraprofessionals are not required to attend but they are welcome to. The principal of Building B expressed confusion as to why the paraprofessionals do not attend the weekly staff meetings. Though topics do not always pertain to the paraprofessionals, during weeks that the discussion centers on a topic relating to the work of the paraprofessionals, they were invited. She admits this needs to be better scheduled and planned. This administrator takes the philosophy that every staff member is a teacher, regardless of title or pay, and that steps need to be taken to provide the information conveyed during staff meetings to all staff, citing time as the biggest challenge in this evolution of her weekly meetings. Paraprofessional perception of this process is similar to that expressed by the principal. While they acknowledged that they could attend if they had the desire, they stated that most of the topics do not apply to them. In the case when a topic did related and they were not in attendance their resource or collaboration teacher filled them in.

One paraprofessional did express a desire to attend and indicated that she had spoken to the two special education teachers in the building about attending, especially in instances when the topic would be beneficial to them. This paraprofessional was critical of the practice of not including paraprofessionals in electronic communication regarding the topics of the meetings so that they could plan ahead. She felt that by attending the meetings, information would be

communicated in a structured manner instead of hearing about it at lunch or from one of the teachers.

In-service days remain available for the professional development of teachers. Since the switch to Collective Inquiry, or the Friday staff meeting in Building B, the district has used professional development days to offer district-wide training for its teachers. These training opportunities are presented in a series of workshops; teachers select the sessions they would like to attend. Very little time is left on days when children do not attend school for building level professional development. Historically, paraprofessionals have not been on contract for these days, but in recent years, as stated above, the district has provided paid time for paraprofessional in-service.

The Special Education Director commented that she wished the district and buildings had a stronger commitment to including paraprofessionals in in-service days. On the other hand, she noted that there would be a fair number of paraprofessionals who would not want to work those days because they are viewed as a day off or time to be with their children. The principal of Building B noted that the struggle is having the time to get everyone together. She commented that the paraprofessionals have important tasks in those days at the beginning of the year, before students arrive, and that she feels guilty pulling them away from that work to attend trainings. With this realization, she was also able to identify the initiatives that require paraprofessional involvement to be successful and continues to work to find ways for the paraprofessionals to be involved in those trainings and meetings.

As-Needed Training

Beyond these formal structures for training, there must also exist the flexibility to train paraprofessionals on topics that arise during the school year. When a new behavioral or

instructional method is adopted, paraprofessionals involved in implementation must be trained. Also, when students have individual needs not previously addressed through services, training is necessary. This district has a less formal process in place to address these needs, but a number of experts have positions in the district that allow them to assist as needs arise.

The Special Education Coordinator listed a number of structures, which exist for this type of training. They include: before or after school training, handled through the special education teacher or district staff; an organized in-service training to meet a particular need; or on-the-job training provided by a consultant, specialist, coordinator or district administrator. While these structures are in place, the coordinator felt like they could be improved upon as the needs of the students and staff change. Building principals indicate that they are aware that if a need arises there is a structure in place for assistance in training needs. Aside from these external structures, special education teachers report that for most of these issues, they are central to the training of their paraprofessionals, as the training is provided on a day-to-day basis working alongside paraprofessionals. A regular education teacher commented that if a paraprofessional in her classroom needed training that she would go to the special education teacher make arrangements, and that the building administrators often attended grade level PLC meetings, so that was also an avenue to voice the need for additional training.

Perceptions and preferences differ among individual teachers in regard to paraprofessional training. One special education teacher indicated that she preferred to do most of this type of training at the beginning of the year before school starts, so that it is not a concern as the year goes on, while another teacher preferred to sit down and talk about these new issues as they came up. Two of the special education teachers report that this type of training has decreased in the last several years. They were not able to provide an explanation for the change. Two of the paraprofessionals expressed frustration at not being included in training opportunities

related to curriculum changes. Others indicated they would work through their special education teacher or the district paraprofessional trainers to get any skills necessary to continue their work.

Apart from the training processes described to this point, the district utilizes a subscription service called Master Teacher. It is an on-line training module used by paraprofessionals to log training hours. The Special Education Director notes that it is expensive and that there are not enough licenses for the software to be used by all paraprofessionals in all buildings. It is targeted to particular programs and individuals based on need. There is a testing protocol along with the program that allows for paraprofessionals to meet No Child Left Behind's definition of highly qualified. Both general and special education teachers acknowledge they are aware of the product, but report little knowledge of topics or activities associate with completing the modules or assessments. Only one paraprofessional reported using the software.

Topics of Training

As a means of qualifying the topics covered in district and building trainings, the paraprofessional and district paraprofessional trainers were asked a series of questions, designed to test the awareness of training topics against an established notion of what paraprofessionals should know before beginning work in the school setting. These topics include: ethical practices for confidential communication about students and disabilities; characteristics of appropriate communications with other members of the education team; effects of disability on a student's life; basic educational terminology regarding students, programs, rules and instructional activities; purpose of programs for students with disabilities; personal cultural biases and differences that effect one's ability to work with others; rules and procedural safeguards regarding the management of student behavior; indicators of abuse and neglect; basic

instructional and remedial strategies and materials; common concerns of families and students with disabilities; demands of various learning environments; roles of educational team members in planning an IEP; rights and responsibilities of families and children as they relate to learning needs; basic technologies appropriate to students with disabilities; and rationale for assessment. Each participant's responses were cataloged on the following table (Table 4.1), based on whether or not the individual was aware of training on each topic, if the training was provided formally or informally, and if the training was provided at the district or building level. In some cases, awareness of whether or not the topic was indicated, but the participant's response did not indicate if the training was provided formally or informally or in what setting. The table also includes a column that indicates whether or not the training topic appears in paper documentation provided by the district and reference to the numeric code identifying the paper document within the study.

Topic	Trainers	Building A, para 1	Building A, para 2	Building B, para 1	Building B, para 2	Document evidence
Ethical practices for confidential communication about students with disabilities	Yes, formal, district	Yes, formal, district	Yes, formal, district	Yes, formal, district	Yes, informal, building	Documents 4, 7, 12
Characteristics of appropriate communication with other members of the education team	Yes, formal, district	No	No	Yes, formal, building	Yes, informal, building	Documents 4, 12
Effects a disability can have on a student's life	Yes, informal, building	Yes, informal, building	Yes, formal, district	Yes	Yes	Document 7
Basic educational terminology regarding students, programs, rules and instructional activities	Yes, formal, district	Yes, formal, district and building	Yes, formal, district	No	Yes, informal, building	Document 7, 12

Purposes of programs of students with disabilities	Yes, informal, building	No	No	Yes, informal, building	Yes, informal, building	Document 7
Personal cultural biases and differences that affect one's ability to work with others	No	Yes, informal, district	No	Yes, informal building	No	No evidence found in provided documentation
Rules and procedural safe guards regarding management of student behavior	No	Yes, informal, building	Yes, formal, district, building	Yes, formal, district, building	Yes, formal, district, building	No evidence found in provided documentation
Indicators of abuse and neglect	Yes, formal	No	No	Yes, formal, district	Yes, informal, building	No evidence found in provided documentation
Basic instructional and remedial strategies and materials	Yes, formal, district	Yes, formal, district, building	Yes, informal, building	Yes	Yes	Documents 10, 11 13
Common concerns of families and students with disabilities	Yes, formal, district	Yes, informal, building	Yes, informal, building	Yes, informal building	Yes, informal, building	No evidence found in provided documentation
Demands of various learning environments	Yes, formal, district	No	No	Yes	No	Document 7
Roles of educational team members in planning an IEP	Yes, formal, district	No	No	No	No	No evidence found in provided documentation
Rights and responsibilities of families and children as they relate to learning needs	No	Yes, formal, district	No	Yes, formal, district	No	No evidence found in provided documentation
Basic technologies appropriate to students with disabilities	No	Yes, informal, building	Yes, informal, building	Yes, informal, building	No	Document 7
Rationale for assessment	Yes, formal, district	Yes, formal, district, building	No	Yes, formal, district, building	Yes, formal, district, building	Document 7

Perceptions of training

Participants involved in the case study were asked questions regarding their perception of the training protocols, described above, provided by the school district. Their responses varied and are reported below. The Special Education Director stressed that there is an art to being a paraprofessional, in the sense that they work alongside a number of teachers each day and that they must adapt to the expectations of each teacher. This is complicated by the fact that the paraprofessional is rarely trained alongside the special education or general education teacher. As stated previously, she feels that it is important for the district and buildings to find ways to include paraprofessionals in in-service training alongside the teachers. Unrelated to this issue, she also noted that when paraprofessionals are asked what kinds of training they are interested in receiving they often fixate on a single topic, which limits their professional growth.

The Special Educator Coordinator focused on issues with paraprofessional training in relationship to the allocation of resources, particularly time. She noted that when training is considered, there is never enough training or time. As you follow this issue through the hierarchy, time continues to be a major barrier. There are not enough hours in the day, and days in the calendar year. With this realization, it is important to maximize the time that is available for training, so that new skills are being taught. Otherwise, the professionals in the system revert back to a care giving model, which does not, ultimately, lead to the best services for the student. The Special Educator Coordinator also stressed that training for paraprofessionals must be reviewed every year, as it changes as the needs of the students change.

Beyond scheduling, there is also the issue of quality. Is the right person delivering the right services at the right time? This relates to paraprofessionals if they have not received the education or training necessary to provide those services. Who provides the training is also an important question, as the Special Educator Coordinator believes the district has a number of

personnel resources able to provide training and that the training perspective should not just come from special education. For example, paraprofessionals who are working in a math classroom may also need training related to the method of math instruction.

Additionally, she notes the barriers related to additional training include the contract days and the number of hours each day that a paraprofessional can be paid. Substitute paraprofessionals are utilized on a limited basis, thus pulling paraprofessionals away from their daily duties for training is not an option. Finally, while it would be great to have every paraprofessional attend every training, reality does not allow this level of inclusion.

The building principals and the school psychologist recognize the system that is in place for three levels of training, occurring through formal structures at the district and building level, along with less formal structures at the building level and each feel comfortable participating in the process. The principal of Building B expressed a desire to know more about the training being provided outside of the building level and how that system works. She went on to state that she has scheduled trainings through the district trainers in the past, but in recent years has instead manipulated the schedule in her building so that the paraprofessionals have 30 minutes each morning to collaborate with their teachers. This allows for a great deal of skill development. This principal and the school psychologist both expressed that they hear a wide range of comments from the paraprofessionals regarding this district level training, ranging from very positive reviews, to feelings that the process is mandatory and that it is just a matter of fulfilling a number of hours. Additionally, they believe that further discussions between the building and district staff should occur regarding how topics of paraprofessional trainings are suggested and the development of a more structured process for building level staff to recommend training topics.

General education teachers reported little knowledge of the training process for paraprofessionals, but the special education teachers had a great deal more insight. All of the special education teachers recognized that district-wide training exists for paraprofessionals, but they focused more on the training that is provided through the working relationships between special education teachers and paraprofessionals. They also recognize that it would be beneficial for the paraprofessionals to be involved in the in-service training opportunities alongside the special education teachers.

Questions were brought up regarding how and who recommends topics to the district trainers, and the need for the special education teachers to have a greater voice in this process. One special education teacher expressed that she felt the topics were “kind of made up,” and that they should be more job specific. She provided the example that there were multiple days of training offered to paraprofessionals at the end of the last school year on ADHD. They commented that while trainings on ADHD were fine, many of the paraprofessionals in attendance did not work with students who have attention issues. Another special education teacher extended the notion of a breakdown between the teachers and the paraprofessionals regarding what goes on in their trainings. She expressed the importance of not only having a hand in recommending the topics, but also knowledge of how the training was delivered and what was covered on each topic. She concluded by saying, “That is a loop that needs to be closed.” This teacher was also critical of the online training model. Her feelings were that it was something that paraprofessionals engaged in for the hours and not in the spirit of gaining new insight.

Each paraprofessional was asked to comment on general issues related to training. One of the two paraprofessionals working in Building A feels confident that job related trainings are made available to him, and that should a need develop he would be provided with the

opportunity to learn the new skill. In his first year of service as a paraprofessional, he participated in the new paraprofessional training, and in the past year he has been trained to use the Aimsweb testing protocol. Often it was the special education teacher who showed him the new process. He echoed the frustration, cited above, that when the district dismissed the students early and provided training for the paraprofessionals, that the topic was interesting, but might not be useful in his future work. When given the opportunity to have a day off or attend training, he stated that if the training pertained to his work he would be happy to attend, but if not, he would gladly have the day off. He recognized that often the teacher-focused daylong in-service meetings were on topics that did not fall within the realm of his professional responsibility and in the end he has happy to receive direction from a teacher.

The second paraprofessional from Building A began work in the middle of the school year and received no face-to-face training, but was offered computer modules. It is her feeling that new paraprofessionals need training and that something should be provided to folks beginning in the middle of the year. She is in strong support of the training that is currently being offered for returning paraprofessionals and feels like she takes away something each year. “I go in every year thinking, I don’t know what I’m doing and always think about what I could do better.” She believes that a role-playing component should be added to the existing trainings, wherein someone acts like the paraprofessional and someone else, the student. In this way trainees learn from actual interactions, not just reading about possible scenarios. Further, she feels it is necessary for each paraprofessional to develop a ‘bag of tricks’ with ideas on how to respond to given situations. It is her practice to write these methods out and to develop a philosophy for her work corresponding with her methods.

Across the district, in Building B, two paraprofessionals provided their insights into the training process. One paraprofessional noted that the training has evolved over the time she has

been with the district. At first, the trainings were video modules with online tests. Now they are focused on getting everyone together and presenting information. Next year, she believes, four of the days that would typically have been days off will involve training for the paraprofessionals in the same fashion a teacher would receive training on in-service days. This change is of some concern to her. If the training includes coverage of a topic that she is not already aware of, then she is happy to attend, but if the training is not valuable, she would find that frustrating. It is her belief that the best training comes from being in the moment with students and learning how to best handle situations.

When reflecting on training topics of the past, she comments that they have been interesting, but not always helpful. She used an example of a situation four years prior. In this case, she was working on a team with a student who was struggling. Specialists from the district worked with her team, but they had tried all of the methods being presented and she felt like they were not learning anything new. When asked if there was some avenue for her to suggest trainings or express frustrations, she believed that she could go to one of the district paraprofessional trainers. She also expressed a desire for an evaluation protocol to be in place following trainings, which would provide means of giving feedback to those involved in the creation and implementation of the training. When asked if she felt the training she was currently receiving at the district level was just a fulfillment of a responsibility of getting hours, she agreed. She expressed that if she was given the option to attend a training session or take personal leave, she took the time off.

The second paraprofessional working in Building B recognized the shift to the district-wide training opportunities led by the paraprofessional trainers. She also noted that in the past year, days, which might have been days off in previous years, were now used for training

purposes. This was helpful to her as there is a requirement that all annual training responsibilities be met by May 1st.

She talked of quality videos that were utilized in the trainings, as well as training in a system for managing students with aggressive behaviors. It was her wish that teachers be included in some of the training as she felt the lessons did not only apply to paraprofessionals. She also expressed frustration that it seemed like some of the trainings were being squeezed in just to get things done. When asked if she was aware of a formalized process for providing feedback to the trainers about how topics were received or ideas for future presentations, she indicated that she was not aware of any formal process, but that she often spoke with the district paraprofessional trainers about what she liked and what was boring. She commented that the trainers were very gracious in accepting the praise and criticism. Her feelings were that, in general, the trainings were effective and of good quality, especially those pertaining to Aimsweb, but that it would be nice to have a quarterly, or half-year, refresher on some of the topics.

Supervision

The supervision of paraprofessionals occurs in two ways within the district. First there is a professional evaluation completed by the special education teacher and principal for each paraprofessional towards the end of the school year. This type of supervision will be referred to as Summative Supervision throughout the case study. Members of the administrative team recognized differences between certified and classified staff in the supervision process, an important distinction for educators who may be most aware of process related to certified staff. Due to this concern, the process of terminating a paraprofessional was considered. The second type of supervision, which will be referred to as Formative Supervision, is the day-to-day modeling, guiding, and teaching that occur among members of the teaching team. Formative

supervision may occur between the principal, general education teacher, or special education teacher and the paraprofessional. Particular attention will be paid to that process, as it exists between teachers and paraprofessionals. Within the context of supervision, it is also necessary to consider the chain of command that paraprofessionals follow if there is an issue in service delivery or with a member of the school team. Finally, the assignment of paraprofessionals to, and within buildings, along with paraprofessional involvement in non-instructional duties will be considered.

Summative Supervision

Summative supervision is perhaps the most straightforward. Respondents reported participation in, or awareness of, the evaluation conducted between the paraprofessional and their supervising special education teacher and principal annually. Documentation was provided that listed the criteria by which a paraprofessional was evaluated. In this process, the special education teacher completes an evaluation tool reviewing the annual performance of a paraprofessional and they, along with the building principal, meet to review the evaluation. In an ideal model, the principal would take an interest in the process, and general education teachers would be consulted to provide input into the paraprofessional's performance. The district does not require special education teachers to seek this feedback from general education teachers, though. According to this policy, the principal is the supervisor for paraprofessionals, even though the special education teacher monitors day-to-day activities and completes the evaluation tool.

The building principals reported little difference in the process as it occurs in Buildings A and B. Both administrators are involved in the evaluation meeting. In Building A, the principal meets with the special education teacher ahead of time to determine if any concerns exist. In

Building B, the principal reviews the document ahead of time. She also reported that issues have not been present in the evaluation of paraprofessionals in Building B, but if concerns were present she would want to be working on them over the course of the school year, not at the end of the process. The administrator from Building A reflected that the process should be improved to identify ongoing issues as early as possible, perhaps by establishing more clearly defined channels of communication, but the process itself did not need to be changed.

External members of the administrative team, reported having limited involvement in summative supervision, but do recall sitting in on evaluation meetings infrequently in past years. The Special Education Coordinator echoed the principal from Building A's position, that any ongoing issues should be managed before the final evaluation. She suggested that plans for improvement should be communicated to all members of the team, as appropriate.

The special education teachers from Building A and B reported the same process discussed above. The special education teachers from Building A reported differing levels of involvement from the administrative team in the meeting to discuss the summative evaluation. In past years, one teacher, reported that whoever was free attended, but this year the new principal wanted to be involved in the process, so he attended the meetings. It has only been in the last four years that administrators were involved at all. Another special education teacher in the building remembers the special education coordinator sitting in once. As stated above, the principal was included last year, although he did not provide input into the conversation.

The special education teachers from Building A reported no concerns with the process or the paraprofessionals they have supervised in recent years. The special education teacher from Building B reported that she completes an evaluation for two paraprofessionals each year and that she goes into each school year knowing that she will complete the evaluation. Her principal is present during the evaluation meeting, but she leads the meeting.

At times the meetings are difficult, especially if the paraprofessional has not been a good fit for the building. The special education teacher mentioned that the principal take a supportive role, but if there is disagreement regarding the situation, they discuss their differing perspectives in regard to the situation. When reflecting on the process, the special education teacher from Building B suggested increasing the frequency of the meetings to twice a year, as a means of helping the paraprofessional develop skills, and to enhance the documentation process.

General education teachers from both buildings expressed limited involvement in the summative supervision process. The teacher from Building A suggested she is only contacted for feedback on the work of a member of the special education staff if an action plan is in place, or the administration is collecting documentation necessary to build a case for termination. She did express involvement in an informal process of providing feedback. If a paraprofessional is doing a good job, the teacher said she communicates that to both the paraprofessional and supervising special education teacher. Similarly, if something is not happening according to expectation that is communicated to the supervising special education teacher as well. When asked if this proactive practice of providing feedback enabled special education teachers to complete an evaluation without formal involvement from the general education teacher, she thought that was a possibility. She went on to say that a process for formal feedback should be in place, using the example that there may be a disconnect between what the special education teacher planned for a paraprofessional to do in a general education classroom and what actually happened. This teacher expressed no knowledge of how the summative evaluation meeting actually worked as she had never attended one and did not have the desire to be included in that aspect of the supervision process. She cited time for everyone to meet and personal discomfort on her part as reasons for not wanting to be involved in this meeting.

The general education teacher in Building B had also not been included in the summative evaluation process or solicited for formal feedback, but felt confident that she had a clear process for reporting comments and concerns that might be included in an evaluation. She went on to state that her role was not to formally observe or evaluate the paraprofessional during their work together. Though, she admits this belief may be held because she has never had an issue with a paraprofessional or felt the need to report a negative situation back to a special education teacher.

All four paraprofessionals report they participated in the summative supervision process and have a formal evaluation annually. They all indicated that their supervising special education teacher completed the paper document and then had a meeting with the paraprofessional and the building principal. Regarding principal involvement, each paraprofessional stated that the building administrator was in attendance, but participation was limited. When asked if the process created anxiety, only one paraprofessional reported that it could be nerve racking. She commented that one never knew exactly what would come up, but that all of her experiences had been positive.

Terminating a Paraprofessional

Another issue regarding the supervision of paraprofessionals has to do with the termination of a paraprofessional. The Special Education Director recalled a story in which a special education teacher thought that paraprofessionals were at-will employees and that no documentation or reason was necessary to let them go. In reality, if such an instance were to occur, the district Human Resources department would require a great deal of documentation, and if that documentation cannot be provided, the person would be retained. She urged special education teachers to keep this type of documentation or things can be very difficult. She indicated that this may be a struggle because special education teachers may not be in the

mindset to document issues related to their paraprofessionals, and this can result in ineffective paraprofessionals keeping their job year after year. The principal from Building A commented on this process and the substantial documentation involved in letting a paraprofessional go, although he has not yet had to terminate a paraprofessional.

Formative Supervision

The formative supervision of paraprofessionals is a more complex issue than that of the summative evaluation. One common issue concerning how teachers work with and supervise paraprofessionals is the lack of preparation the teacher has on this topic. The Special Education Director reflected on her own experience as a beginning special education teacher and expressed that she did not feel prepared for the process at all. In order to support teachers new to the profession at the district level, a new teacher academy is in place; one of the breakout sessions focuses on supervising paraprofessionals. Specific topics include documenting concerns, the communication process, and management styles. The Special Education Coordinator recognized the same concern and stressed that age is often a factor in the discomfort a special education teacher may feel regarding the supervision of paraprofessionals. A new teacher maybe 10 years younger than a paraprofessional, and yet may know little about the students compared to someone, like a paraprofessional, who has previous work experience in the school.

The special education teachers from both buildings remembered struggling with supervision when they were new teachers. One of the teachers felt that she was prepared to supervise the paraprofessional, but was still very leery. She stated that if she had not been a paraprofessional herself, it would have been much worse. Another special education teacher stated that she was in no way prepared for the role. As a twenty-one year old without an assertive personality, she said the paraprofessionals were all over the place and that she had to

work to develop the skills necessary to effectively supervise. She also noted that developing these skills took a long time. Another special education teacher did not have a paraprofessional in her first year of teaching, but she had a student teacher that she was not prepared to supervise. Over the years, she has worked in classrooms with multiple paraprofessionals and when she took a job in a new school, the paraprofessionals generally would know more about the kids and the program than she did.

The general education teacher echoed the feelings of the special education teachers, both indicating that they had no formal training regarding supervising paraprofessionals in their training programs. One general education teacher shared that she was terrified of the paraprofessionals for the reasons stated above. In her second year, she adopted the approach that everyone was going to be a team, and since then, she has found a great deal of satisfaction having paraprofessionals in her classroom.

Understanding that there is a great deal of anxiety surrounding the supervision process in the beginning, it is important to look to the process each special education teacher utilizes to supervise the paraprofessional assigned to them each year. One of the special education teachers from Building A begins each year with the goal of first making the paraprofessionals totally aware of the students and their needs, utilizing IEP documentation. This is important because she likes to rotate her paraprofessionals among the students on her caseload. She is concerned that students can demonstrate a learned dependence when they only work with one paraprofessional. She also realizes that working with the same student every day can lead to burnout for the paraprofessional.

She also stressed that a key to supervising paraprofessionals is organization. She creates folders for each day of the week and they are kept in a specific spot in her office. In the folders, each student has everything they need for the week marked. Her paraprofessionals can look at

these lessons and know what to expect for the week. This process also gives them the opportunity to ask questions, if they have any, regarding the week's lessons. At the beginning of the year, she spends a lot of time writing specifically what she wants each paraprofessional to do, but as the year goes on, through the relationships she builds, she learns what each paraprofessional needs and is able to adjust accordingly. In addition to the folders, on Sunday evenings, she sends emails to all of her paraprofessionals telling them exactly what the week has in store and what student needs exist.

This teacher relies heavily on written instruction in case she is gone from the classroom for any reason, but also verbally communicates with the paraprofessionals. She believes that effective communication leads to rapport with the paraprofessionals, which results in an intrinsic motivation for the paraprofessionals to want to help and do a good job. She is aware of other paraprofessionals in other buildings, who do not benefit from this type of communication and they feel like they are not aware of what is going on for students. In addition to written and verbal communication, modeling is another important aspect of this teacher's work. She wants paraprofessionals to watch how she works and what she says to students, as a learning technique.

The other special education teacher from Building A begins the school year by going over the schedule and mapping out what each paraprofessional will be doing throughout the days and weeks of the school year. As changes occur, she touches base with the paraprofessionals to communicate these new needs. She relies heavily on verbal communication, but at the end of the day tries to email about things for the next day; her paraprofessionals have the chance to check their emails each morning. As far as supervision, her priority is making sure the paraprofessionals are following their schedules and are providing the assigned services.

She felt it was important to develop trust with her paraprofessionals and that relationships with them take time to develop. It is a plus for her to have the same paraprofessionals year in and year out because that relationship can take up to a year to develop.

Regarding the transference of skills, this teacher also believes in modeling. She reflected on a potential situation in which she and a paraprofessional might both be working in the DR with different group of students. If the paraprofessional was unable to control a behavior issue, that paraprofessional might come to her and ask for assistance. The teacher would then model what she would like to see the paraprofessional do in a similar situation in the future. This day-to-day modeling is an important way to teach both behavioral and academic interventions.

This teacher invites her paraprofessionals to have input in instructional planning, by sharing ideas, specifically when they work closely with a child and develop knowledge of what works for that particular student. She cited time as the major barrier to effectively engaging in supervision, indicating that her use of email helps when she cannot speak with the paraprofessionals directly. She hoped that in the coming year, they will build in time, either on a weekly or bi-monthly basis, for special education teachers and paraprofessionals to touch base and discuss concerns.

The general education teacher from Building A expressed little in the way of practices for direct supervision. She stated that managing the work of paraprofessionals differed for each individual, giving examples of paraprofessionals who take direction easily and others she must interact with constantly. She indicated that the supervising special education teacher is really the hub for working with the paraprofessionals and that she is her point of contact. Modeling was her most relied upon tool for shaping the paraprofessionals work within her classroom.

The paraprofessionals from Building A acknowledged the processes described by the general and special education teachers. One of the paraprofessionals spoke directly about the

process of giving both oral and written directions utilized by the first special education teacher, stating that he would receive lesson plans a week early, so he had plenty of time to prepare to deliver the instruction. He was not confident that this level of planning and detail of instruction was provided by every special education teacher. He complimented this teacher on her ability to plan ahead and to know the programs for each of the students. He also pointed out that this level of planning corresponded with his own planning style. He confirmed that his supervising special education teacher went over the IEP documentation for each student, as well. The supervision he received changed as the year went on. He believed this happened because his supervising teacher began to feel she was telling him things he did not need to hear, based on his previous experience as a classroom teacher. The teacher was very conscious about what she said and provided in writing to her paraprofessionals.

The second paraprofessional spoke directly of learning by watching the special education teacher, indicating that she just watches the teacher work and learns what to do. This modeling takes place frequently when they have group interactions or when students are pulled in to the DR for specific interventions. This paraprofessional also appreciated the dialogue between the special education teacher and herself, speaking of times when she would come with a problem or concern and receive valuable guidance. She also felt that there is adequate time to engage in these conversations when the paraprofessionals and teachers are in the DR together.

Regarding working with general education teachers, this paraprofessional feels very comfortable and is willing to make accommodations within her work. She shared the example of when she received a specific direction from a general education teacher, but knew that if she followed the direction exactly, the situation with the student would become worse. Following her own instinct she continued the activity, but discussed the situation with the teacher

afterwards. She also acknowledged that a level of trust, rapport and communication is necessary for these relationships to be successful.

The special education teacher from Building B also begins the year by going over the IEP documentation with her paraprofessionals, as a means of insuring that everyone understands the needs of each student. She is concerned with making sure that each member of the team can see the big picture and shares a vision for the success of each child. She works directly with her paraprofessionals regarding what she expects in terms of communication with other members of the team and what comes back to her. She spoke of a challenge in this area when a wonderful teacher and excellent paraprofessional are paired together. The result is that she is often left behind in understanding what is going on with students receiving direct services from the pair. In her mind, this is not a bad problem to have, but she has to be mindful to remain looped into the conversation with what is going on when two highly effective professionals are working together to meet the needs of a student.

As a result of the relationships she has with her paraprofessionals, she utilizes a ‘planning on the fly’ strategy. She is involved in constant, daily conversations with her paraprofessionals about all aspects of the services provided to students. How things are going in particular classrooms, what is happening for a student, and how an instruction lesson went, are all topics that are being covered in these ongoing conversations. Because of this, she does not have to sit down with her paraprofessionals to cover these issues. Additionally, this leads to a great deal of shared responsibility. She gave an example of a student’s behavior sheet: The paraprofessional might exchange it with her a number of times before it is sent home to the parent.

As their relationship develops, paraprofessionals often take on more responsibilities. When asked if her paraprofessionals were involved in planning, she admitted that sometimes they were. For example, last year, one of her paraprofessionals really liked developing activities,

so she gave her the indicators for an alternative state assessment tool. The paraprofessional then designed games and supplemental activities to focus on those indicators. Allowing her to expand her role in this way kept her engaged in her work in a way that was interesting to her, instead of completing more mundane tasks.

Like many other respondents this teacher also believed in the power of relationships. She recounted a situation when a paraprofessional and general education teacher had built a very solid relationship and worked well together. The general education teacher was going to loop with her students the following year and requested that the paraprofessional loop with her. The general education teacher was really shaken by the idea that the paraprofessional might not advance grades and their great working relationship might not continue. That type of relationship takes a great deal of effort to develop; one has to provide constant feedback and consistently observe, to know what is happening. A level of comfort is established, when the paraprofessional comes to know that the teacher trusts them and that feedback will be provided to them. This level of comfort changes a relationship for the better, which results in a better situation for the students.

The general education teacher from Building B also indicated that she communicates with the paraprofessional assigned to her room constantly, perhaps more than she communicates with the special education teacher. She provides feedback in support of the paraprofessional role in the classroom and sets the expectation that the paraprofessional should feel free to jump in at any time, as the paraprofessional is more of a co-teacher than a classroom aide. She feels setting these expectations upfront makes supervising the paraprofessional much simpler. She has worked with her current paraprofessional over a number of years and their relationship has become second nature, so much so, that the paraprofessional will make suggestions regarding interventions to support all of the students in the classroom. This collaboration has led to a

situation where she does not feel she has to supervise her paraprofessional, in the traditional sense. The general education teacher does not provide specific lesson plans for the paraprofessional, but assumes that she is modeling the instruction being provided to the class.

The paraprofessionals from Building B commented first on the ‘planning on the fly’ strategy articulated by the special education teacher. One paraprofessional pointed out that often information needed to be shared and that the protected morning collaboration time was utilized as a means of sharing this information; other issues discussed during the morning collaboration time included behavior issues, goals, and testing. She also noted that their collaboration was not limited to this morning meeting. The daily communication also served as a process by which the special education teacher provided instruction to the paraprofessionals on new concepts or skills. The paraprofessional confirmed that the special education teacher relied almost exclusively on oral communication, with limited emails and perhaps a note on her desk, if contact was not going to be possible. The paraprofessional expressed that the special education teacher was constantly sharing situations and best practices with her paraprofessionals as a means of communicating about possible scenarios. When asked if the paraprofessional would change anything about the communication practices developed by the special education teacher, she said that she would not and that the special education teacher really respects the paraprofessionals and this can be seen through her communication and the development of additional responsibilities for the paraprofessionals. She also stated that rapport and trust were necessary components of the relationship.

The second paraprofessional from Building B worked with a special education teacher who was not a respondent in the case study. When asked about time to plan or collaborate alongside her special education teacher, this paraprofessional indicated that this was scheduled for thirty minutes once a week. When asked to clarify this based on other indications that

collaboration time was set aside daily, the paraprofessional stated daily collaboration was more of a situation where she and the teacher talked in passing and that the weekly meetings with the special education teacher only occurred about half the time. The paraprofessional expressed frustration regarding this inconsistency. She stated that her supervising special education teacher had taken on more responsibilities in the past academic year and that because of this meeting and collaborating had become harder. She said that communication happened as time allowed, generally by email or in passing, but not in any structured way. Another contributing factor in this lack of communication was the time the paraprofessional spent working in general education classrooms. Over the past year, the pair only had about 15 minutes each day working in the same space. Accordingly, when things needed to be communicated by the special education teacher to the paraprofessional, it was often handled through emails. The paraprofessional did indicate that having the email communication was beneficial because it provided a way to reference the information later. When asked if there were things that should be changed about the supervision process, this paraprofessional mentioned that there needed to be more communication; that it would be nice to know about changes in advance; and that the protection of the daily and weekly collaboration time would be beneficial towards that end.

Chain of Command

A recurring topic regarding supervision was the chain of command followed by paraprofessionals when issues related to their work developed and how those issues were taken up through the hierarchy of supervision. The Special Education Director indicated that the district provided multiple avenues for paraprofessionals to report concerns, including the paraprofessional's supervising special education teacher, the building principal, the special

education coordinator assigned to the building, or in some cases, the special education director. From the paraprofessional's perspective the practice is similar in each building.

In Building A, the paraprofessionals comment that if there is an issue in the context of the general education classroom, they would speak directly with the general education teacher. If an issue occurred in a different environment they would go directly to their supervising special education teacher. Rationale for this practice came not from the awareness of an established policy, but the feeling that if something is going on in the general education teacher's classroom, they have a right to know and should have the option to be the first to respond to the situation and how it should be resolved. One paraprofessional remembered an instance when she did not speak to the general education teacher but instead went to her supervisor and reflected that she hated to bypass the general education teacher. When asked if she would ever go above the general or special education teacher and take an issue directly to a principal, she stated that she would not, as it would be breaking the chain of command.

In Building B, the paraprofessionals indicated any time an issue occurred they went directly to their supervising teacher. If the issue involved the supervising teacher they would go directly to the building principal. One paraprofessional reflected on a situation when she needed to go to her building principal and indicated the administrator was already aware of the situation and invited her to express her frustrations. The situation did not have an immediate solution; a fact which the building principal expressed.

Other administrators had similar notions of how the chain of command should function when handling paraprofessional concerns. The Special Education Coordinator, stated that only the most flagrant concerns would ever be taken directly to a special education director and that typical situations were handled in the building, with the paraprofessional speaking directly to a general or special education teacher. If an issue could not be resolved at that level, they should

continue to the building principal. They might also check in with a school psychologist or the special education coordinator assigned to the building as a point of reference, or for guidance on the issue. This second step would depend on what type of relationship the paraprofessional had with members of the administrative team. The Special Education Coordinator felt the chain of command was typical and apparent to the paraprofessionals. She also noted that they might first speak to one of the district paraprofessional trainers to help clarify any questions related to the chain of command.

The principal from Building A said that the special education teacher serves as a 'kind of buffer' and that they do their best to handle issues originating with the paraprofessionals. As stated above, this principal was new to the building, and indicated that the chain may not have always been followed in the past year, due to the lack of the relationship he had with the staff. Alternative avenues might have included the coordinator or director. He believed that as relationships improved with time, the chain of command would become more clearly defined. The School Psychologist expressed this same concern, indicating that folks in the building needed time to get to know the new principal, but that in her experience he was very open.

One possible frustration in the process, the principal noted, is the lack of training and experience of general and special education teachers in the process of professional supervision. He points out that supervision is difficult, and the role is not as clearly defined as it might be for the special education teacher. This is something he has tried to develop within the teachers on his team as issues present themselves. Special education teachers need to keep in mind that they will be required to engage in roles that are not typical of a teacher. He says that when one enters the role of an administrator, one knows that supervision is a part of the job and training is provided for that role. Special education teachers probably do not even think about supervision and as a group may struggle with the necessary confrontation skills. It is also hard for the

general education teacher to know what to take to the special education teacher or to say to the paraprofessional. Finally, he indicated that it is very rare for a paraprofessional to come to him with issues, but that he imagines they would feel like he was the next step in the chain of command.

Building B's principal indicated that she speaks with her staff regularly about chain of command and how issues are handled in the building. She trusts everyone in her building to keep this expectation front and center and to rely on her open door policy. If issues develop for paraprofessionals, they go to their supervising special education teacher. If they are uncomfortable with this, the paraprofessional is expected to take the issue to the principal. This administrator also expressed awareness that a paraprofessional might seek out guidance from one of the district paraprofessional trainers, but has never been included in a conversation that involved one of the trainers. She imagined that this avenue is a good means for paraprofessionals to better understand the issue they are having.

General and special education teachers from Building A expressed consistent expectations about the chain of command. The special education teachers indicated that at the beginning of each school year they meet with their paraprofessionals and talk about the chain of command. One teacher felt that the paraprofessionals were comfortable with the chain of command, but continually urges them to communicate with their supervisor and the general education teacher with whom they work. She continually engages in coaching on this aspect of their work. She reflected on a specific instance when a paraprofessional was given conflicting advice from an occupational therapist and teacher. She urged the paraprofessional to engage each of them in a conversation, with the aim of helping the paraprofessional develop professionally.

The other special education teacher indicated that if she ever had an issue with a paraprofessional, she would go straight to the principal. She did not as readily agree that the chain of command was clear to all, but indicated that when paraprofessionals have issues with general education teachers, they come to her, and that is how it has always been. In an ideal model, she believed all paraprofessionals would know that the management of all issues begins with the special education teacher to whom they are assigned for supervision. She worried that in the past, they have gone to other special education teachers, a practice she viewed as inappropriate. She also expressed confusion about the role of the district paraprofessional trainers as sounding boards when paraprofessionals have issues.

The general education teacher from Building A expressed that if a paraprofessional experienced an issue in her classroom the issue be brought directly to her so that she can handle the concern. If she was not able to handle the concern, the paraprofessional should then go to their supervising special education teacher. When she experiences an issue with a paraprofessional, special education teacher, or services, she feels she can go directly to the principal. She also reported the successful resolution of issues that she has taken directly to a special education teacher. When asked if she was aware of a policy for formal practice concerning a chain of command, she was not sure, and indicated her responses were based on what she has always done and what works for her.

General and special education teachers from Building B communicated a very consistent understanding of how paraprofessional issues should be handled and how the chain of command is communicated. The special education teacher indicated that the paraprofessionals have a great relationship with the principal and expressed no concerns if the paraprofessional spoke with the principal before coming to her, as she knows the issues will be handled correctly. She reflected on a specific situation in which the principal became involved. She met with the principal and

communicated what she had heard from the paraprofessional. They then were able to brainstorm potential solutions. She indicated that if she had an issue with a paraprofessional, she would also go to the building principal, as well as speak with the district paraprofessional trainer as a means of seeking additional input.

The general education teacher did not report experiencing any issue that required using the chain of command, but was well aware of the protocol and who to go to if an issue developed. She indicated she would start with the special education teacher and then go to the building principal. She was aware of a situation that occurred two years earlier in which the chain of command was followed after a paraprofessional had an issue with a special education teacher that could not be resolved without outside intervention.

Documents provided by the district trainers included a Communication Plan for Paraeducators. The plan, which exists as a single sheet of paper, is provided to paraprofessionals during the beginning of the school year training and includes the communication chains across four topics: Questions about Schedules, Questions about Duties, Questions about Students and Questions about Procedures. Under each topic a specific chain of command is outlined for the resolution of each type of issue. The document was not mentioned by any of the paraprofessionals from Building A or B, during interviews.

Paraprofessional Assignment

Each school building in the district hires paraprofessionals; the Special Education Director is not involved in that process. Her role is to decide how many paraprofessionals each building is assigned, using a basic allotment formula. The formula is based on a student rating system. Each year, the special education coordinators and school psychologists rate each student based on level of need from having a significant to mild disability. One paraprofessional is

assigned for every three students with significant disabilities and one paraprofessional for every seven mild to moderate students.

The Special Education Director admits that the system is not elaborate and is very subjective. She has seen a number of more complex systems that weight each student by certain factors, but feels this method, developed by her and other directors from the region, works just as well. This model does not take center-based programs into account; those are staffed separately. If a building team believes some special consideration needs to be taken, there is a process to request additional paraprofessional support. Once the number of paraprofessionals available to each building is established, the building administrative team hires, and assigns paraprofessionals to roles within the building.

The principals from Building A and B recognize the formula for the assignment of paraprofessionals and comment that they are able to adequately cover the services for their students with the paraprofessionals assigned to their buildings. Neither administrator reported utilizing the process to request additional paraprofessional support. The principal from Building B also recognized the mandate that paraprofessionals are not to complete more than one hour of non-instructional duty each day. This impacts how paraprofessionals are assigned to both instructional and non-instructional duties. The topic is covered in greater detail below.

Another issue related to the assignment of paraprofessionals came up among multiple respondents from Building A. During the last academic year, the principal moved the process for scheduling the work of the paraprofessionals from the special education team to the building administrative team. Coming into the building, the principal noticed that paraprofessionals were assigned to teachers and then the special education teacher scheduled the work of the paraprofessional to meet the needs of the students receiving special education services. In the coming school year, there will be a shift and the work of paraprofessionals will be assigned

based on student need instead of assignment to specific teachers. The principal believed that this shift would create anxiety for both special education teachers and paraprofessionals, but that the move was done specifically to make service delivery more flexible as the needs of students changed. It is important to consider this change along with supervision and training, as it has possible consequences for evaluation purposes, discussed below. From this point forward, the special education teacher will continue to be assigned paraprofessionals for evaluation purposes. In the future, if this change in assignment creates issues for formal evaluations, assignment of paraprofessionals for supervision may become randomized.

When this issue was brought to the attention of the special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals, they did not express the anxiety the principal forecasted. One of the special education teachers commented that a master schedule for the assignment of all staff had to be created and that she was just as happy to have that done without her involvement. She also felt that working relationships would not suffer with this move, as the teachers and paraprofessionals would work side-by-side. The other special education teacher indicated that she had different paraprofessionals from year to year and the change would not create issues. Her only concern was that when a certain fit was necessary between the paraprofessional, student, and teacher, that those relationships would need to be maintained and that she would advocate for those needs if that became an issue. The general education teacher had no awareness of the issue and commented only that when the same paraprofessional came to her classroom on a consistent basis, it made building a relationship easier.

Non-Instructional Duties

Assigning paraprofessionals to duties outside the process of providing direct services to students was a concern raised by multiple participants. The Special Education Director

discussed the assignment of paraprofessionals to buildings and focused on a school that lost five paraprofessionals in a single year. The concern raised by administrators, in that building centered on the struggle to cover lunch duties with fewer staff members, instead of concerns based on how special education services would be maintained with fewer paraprofessionals. She went on to explain that the building principal assigns roles to paraprofessionals, which include monitoring the bus loop before and after school, and supervision during lunchtime. When a paraprofessional position is removed from a building, it is this coverage that the building misses. It is not a concern for her when a paraprofessional covers before or after school drop off, or the bus loop, but she is concerned when paraprofessionals are used to supervise lunch. This time is taken directly from students who should be receiving special education services from the paraprofessional during the school day. She reported that building administrators indicate that they cannot have paraprofessionals in the buildings and not assign them to these duties, as it would not be fair to other members of the building staff.

Principals from Building A and B reported similar practices when using paraprofessionals to supervise students before and after school and during lunchtime. At Building A, the principal indicated that when service hours are met, meaning the necessary minutes provided to all students receiving special education services, additional paraprofessional time is used for this type of supervision. He notes that the paraprofessionals cover lunch duty, which includes two half hour shifts, and some before and after school supervision, and that this time is not specific to a student's special education needs. The School Psychologist who supports both Buildings A and B noted that having paraprofessionals cover two lunch periods can lead to scheduling issues regarding the delivery of services to students. The principal from Building B reported assigning one half hour period of lunch duty to each paraprofessional and assigning them before or after school supervision, but noted they had

moved paraprofessionals away from morning supervision so they had time to collaborate with their special education teacher. She thought it would be “smart if she had enough people to run the lunch duty without using them,” so that she could keep them working with students, but she did not have enough people to cover lunch without the paraprofessionals.

Only the special education teachers from Building A expressed concerns related to paraprofessionals covering building duties. Their concerns, similarly to others interviewed, centered on the supervision of lunch. One special education teacher used the example that mathematics instruction happened during the time when lunch coverage was required, which resulted in less coverage to students for math. The severity of the impact to services is dependent on which grade level the paraprofessional serves. Both special education teachers from Building A commented that they were loosely aware of a state level rule that limited the amount of time a paraprofessional could be involved in activities outside of direct services to students. This rule limits these activities to one hour per day. At times, one of the special education teachers reported, she needed to work to protect the time her paraprofessional had to work with students, instead of spending time performing supervision duties. The paraprofessional assigned to this special education teacher confirmed that she was very protective of the hour limit on his time for engaging in activities outside of service delivery.

Advice Regarding Paraprofessionals

In the attempt to gain greater insight into each professional’s perception of the work of a paraprofessional, all interviews ended with the same series of questions regarding what advice the participant would provide to other members of the educational team about the work of paraprofessionals. Specifically, participants were asked what insight they would share with a special education director, a building principal, general and special education teachers, and other

paraprofessionals about the work, the nature of the training, and supervision of paraprofessionals.

When principals were asked to provide advice for special education directors, they commented that it was important to talk to the paraprofessionals and to treat them with respect. The Special Educator Coordinator indicated that one must plan and organize trainings for paraprofessionals and protect the time and resources necessary to implement the training protocols. Additionally, a director should be aware of the procedures and policies in place for classified staff, so that expectations are clearly set.

The district trainers felt that treating paraprofessionals with respect was important, as this gained them the paraprofessionals' loyalty. Involving the paraprofessionals in the collaboration process as much as possible would also be helpful, as they have a strong awareness of a number of situations. General education teachers offered that it is important to provide information regarding paraprofessional training to the general education teachers and that maintaining a high standard for paraprofessional qualifications is extremely important. Additionally, there can be a great deal of conflict between special education teachers and paraprofessionals because of the demands of the job.

The special education teachers commented that paraprofessionals should be paid more for the work that they do. In regards to the hiring of paraprofessionals, the special education teachers believe a system should always be in place for teacher involvement in the hiring of paraprofessionals. Regarding hiring, they further explain, "the quality of person hired needs to be reliable, have great work ethic, and the ability to enjoy what they are doing. The rest can be taught." The special education teachers also echoed the statement of the administrators, in that the director should meet with the paraprofessionals individually and personally invest in them when they are new to the building.

Finally, the paraprofessionals believe that if they are required to carry out instruction, adequate time needs to be provided to prepare, but that paraprofessional involvement in the preparation of instruction should be limited. They also believed that the director should engage the paraprofessional in direct communication as they have a level of insight that is not paralleled by other professionals in the building.

When asked what advice should be provided to a building level administrator, the Special Education Director would emphasize the importance of the paraprofessionals and that attention must be paid to how paraprofessionals are utilized within the building; specifically, what non-special education duties are filled by paraprofessionals. The Special Education Coordinator indicated that the process of scheduling the paraprofessionals is a key factor for principals to monitor. It is important for an administrator to know the needs of the building and to get the right people in the right spots. The needs of individual buildings can vary widely. One must know who to call to provide training, what legal issues come into play, and the difference between certified and classified employees from the human resources perspective.

Additionally, both principals stressed the impact that a paraprofessional can have on the building environment and the importance of respecting their position as employees. The principal from Building A expanded this notion by adding that the paraprofessional can do a great deal of damage to the environment if non-confrontational teachers tolerate the ineffective practice of specific paraprofessionals. When issues are not addressed the paraprofessional can do a great deal of damage to the relationship between general and special education teachers as well.

The general education teacher from Building A noted the importance of communication, but also wondered if the paraprofessionals really feel like they are a part of the building team; wondering if it was more of a 'them against us,' relationship between the paraprofessionals and

the special education teachers. She believes this can be fixed by really including the paraprofessionals in training and in all communication. In a similar vein, the general education teacher from Building B discussed open communication. She used her principal as a positive example of how an open door policy and a foundation of trust in handling conflict leads staff to openly express and resolve issues that come up as a part of the professional relationship. She felt that any administrator could benefit from adopting this practice.

The special education teachers also stressed communication, teacher involvement in the hiring process, and the importance of appropriate training. Differences were expressed in the opinion of training for paraprofessionals among the special education teachers from Building A. One teacher stated that it was very important to include paraprofessionals in as much of the training, alongside teachers, as possible. The other special education teacher from Building A, believed the principal should do a better job of communicating when a CI meeting did not pertain to the work of the paraprofessional so that they did not have to attend. One of the special education teachers from Building A noted the importance of protecting time on a daily basis for the special education teacher to collaborate with paraprofessionals. She believes this time is essential and can “make or break” the work of the paraprofessional. This is a consistent need, but she worried that other professionals perceived the time when the special education teachers and paraprofessionals engage in collaboration as wasted time.

The paraprofessionals offered little advice to the building administrator, outside of wanting to be included in communication and treated with respect. A paraprofessional from Building B, expressed that the principal’s practice of proactively managing conflict provides a feeling of respect and appreciation.

The Special Education Director, when asked for advice to general and special education teachers, highlighted including paraprofessionals in the classroom community, making sure to

introduce them to students and to emphasize that they work with all students. The Special Education Coordinator noted that the paraprofessionals are an extension of the special education teacher, and if the paraprofessional's performance does not meet expectations, action must be taken. She continued that both general education and special education teachers are responsible for all services to children and must guide the work of the paraprofessional. The role of the paraprofessional is to engage with students, not to make copies and act as a classroom aide. The District Trainers both focused on the importance of communication.

The principal from Building A stressed the collaboration between general and special education teachers related to the evaluation of paraprofessionals, and expressed the need to focus on all students, not the differences between general and special education students. The principal and school psychologist from Building B advised that the paraprofessional is a resource to be utilized as a part of the team. It is important for staff to make sure that paraprofessionals have what they need to fulfill their role alongside classroom teachers.

One of the general education teachers from Building B wanted teachers to not be afraid of becoming a collaboration teacher, because it is a great thing. Further, general education teachers wanted to express how thankful they should be to special education teachers because of the support they provided. They also encouraged them to be in contact with the teachers and paraprofessionals as much as possible, as a close working relationship is necessary for success.

All four of the special education teachers believed that communication was an essential practice to both general education and special education teachers. One of the special education teachers from Building A added that it is important to develop a mindset that work and student related issues are professional not personal. A new special education teacher should not feel intimidated by the age or years of experience of a paraprofessional and should focus on how each role can most effectively meet the needs of the students.

All of the paraprofessionals focused on communication as a key concept for general and special education teachers. The paraprofessionals from Building A also focused on the importance of the structure provided by special education teachers. One went as far as to say that he felt that more paraprofessionals will leave the profession if their work is chaotic, because they are not paid well enough to work with a great deal of frustration. Building A paraprofessionals pointed out the difference between verbal and written communication and stated that a combination of the two is important. One of the paraprofessionals from Building B stressed that she is there to help the teacher and support all of the students and is willing to do whatever it takes to provide that.

Regarding advice to paraprofessionals, the Special Education Director discussed the importance of knowing both the students and the teachers whose rooms you support, because every classroom is different and a paraprofessional will need to adapt to each room. Also, providing special education services is different than being a parent. This can be a difficult boundary to accept and understand, but supporting a student means helping them gain independence.

The Coordinator believes that the paraprofessional is an important educational tool. Paraprofessionals should look beyond their title and know that they are providing direct services to students. Additionally, it is important to be up moving around and helping students, rather than sitting in the back of a room. The District Trainers focused on the importance of being proactive. For example, if there is missing information or confusion, the best strategy is to ask questions.

The building principals stressed the importance of the role of the paraprofessional. The principal of building A said, “you may not always get the credit you deserve, but your job is as important as anyone else in the building; student performance shows when the paraprofessional

is effective.” The principal from Building B extended her philosophy that everyone is the same; regardless of titles, everyone in her school building is a teacher and impacts student. This philosophy creates the climate that she believes is the most effective.

The general education teacher from building B stated that she wanted paraprofessionals to know how important they are to the overall success of her classroom. The special education teachers from Building A wanted to remind paraprofessionals to ask a lot of questions. One of the special education teachers believes the paraprofessional can be the eyes and ears for her regarding student process and need. Communicating that information is of vital importance. The other special education teacher from Building A would tell a paraprofessional to be flexible and willing to learn on the job. Also, when issues arise the paraprofessional should talk to her supervisor and not the other paraprofessionals regarding concerns. Finally, it is important to enjoy each success when working with students. The special education teacher from Building B urged paraprofessionals to not be afraid of new situations and urged that they must trust their instincts. She also agrees with the perspective stated above that the paraprofessional exists as the eyes and ears of the special education teacher.

Finally, the paraprofessionals from Building A cautioned not to be too authoritarian. A paraprofessional must be a negotiator. One also must keep the best interests of the students close at heart and to look for the positive in all students. They felt it was important to understand student behavior for what it is, and help students to feel good about themselves; paraprofessionals need to remind students that they are on the student’s side; they are the good guys. The paraprofessionals from Building B proposed flexibility and open-mindedness as necessary tools, as well as communication, and the ability to appropriately vent about your work. This group also restated what has been noted above, that asking questions is key to continued

success. Finally, the paraprofessional is not a glorified baby sitter; there is a lot that goes into the professional role.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training and supervision in inclusive elementary schools. Generalizations from findings are reported as both Level One and Level Two inferences as described by Yin (2009).

Descriptive findings from the case study are presented in a linear fashion as participants in the study share their constructions surrounding the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training and supervision in inclusive elementary schools. Inferences drawn from these findings are Level One inferences. Analytic generalizations are made as the two rival theories are set against one another and compared in the case study as a whole, and through the comparisons made between the two embedded units. These analytic generalizations are Level Two inferences.

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section presents the relevant finding of the study as they relate to the literature review in Chapter II. The second section presents conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice. The third section discusses limitations and recommendations for future research.

Statement of the Problem

Paraprofessionals, called by different names at different times, have been a part of the American school system since the 1950s (Pickett et al., 2003). Throughout this history, the paraprofessional has been an extension of the schoolteacher and has served as an aide in both instructional and non-instructional tasks within the school building (Bowman & Klopff, 1967; Cruickshank & Herring, 1957; Gartner, 1971; Jackson & Acosta, 1971; Kaplan, 1977; Pickett, 1989). The paraprofessional has been a reflection of the community, sharing cultural and

economic characteristics of the students, in a way the teacher did not (Gartner, 1971). Since the middle of the last century, the number of paraprofessionals has steadily increased, and this trend is expected to continue through the remainder of this decade ("Occupational outlook handbook, 2010-11 edition, teacher assistants," 2010; Pickett et al., 2003). Despite their numbers, and importance to the functioning of a school building, they have largely been ignored by state and federal governing agencies responsible for education (Pickett et al., 2003). Today, both NCLB and IDEA express the importance of their impact, but only offer vague guidelines regarding their qualifications and training, indicating that in Title 1 programs they must possess specific qualifications in order to be hired, and that they must work only under the direction of a teacher.

Administrative and court decisions do provide some guidance regarding how a district determines if a student needs paraprofessional support, how those paraprofessionals should be selected, their qualifications, and what roles and responsibilities are appropriate (Etscheidt, 2005). At times, these administrative and court decisions have provided contradictory guidance to schools. For example, in terms of determining if a student would benefit from a paraprofessional's services, schools have been charged with denying FAPE to a student for assigning a paraprofessional; they have been similarly charged for denying a child the services of a paraprofessional. What is clear is that it is the role of the school to select and assign the paraprofessional to the student based on ability and qualifications. It is also the school's responsibility to adequately train the paraprofessional to engage in the tasks necessary to fully support the students. Any specific qualifications for a paraprofessional to work with a child must be expressed in that child's IEP. Administrative and judicial analysis indicates that the role of the paraprofessional is to supplement, not supplant, special education and related services. In common terms, the paraprofessional may support the work of the general or special education teacher, but should not create and implement instruction without the direct supervision of a

licensed teacher. This supervision of paraprofessionals by qualified teachers is not unlike other supervisory relationships in schools, except for the fact that teachers rarely report feeling qualified to perform this role (Etscheidt, 2005).

The academic literature on the topic of paraprofessionals is sorted in to nine topics, which include: (a) hiring and retention of paraprofessionals, (b) training, (c) roles and responsibilities, (d) respect and acknowledgement, (e) interactions of paraprofessionals with students and staff, (f) supervision, (g) students' perspectives on paraprofessional support, (h) school change, and (i) alternatives to the use of paraprofessionals (Giangreco et al., 2010). The literature reports that it is difficult to hire and retain a sufficient number of paraprofessionals, and school administrators feel lucky when they are able to find well-qualified applicants (Giangreco et al., 2010).

Adequate training is necessary for paraprofessionals to engage in any role they are assigned (Breton, 2010; Davis et al., 2007; Giangreco et al., 2002b; Griffin-Shirley & Marlock, 2004; Riggs, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Whitaker, 2000). The academic literature provides findings related to specific training modules, but no guidance for a school seeking to design a system-wide training program, save the fact that training should be both specific to jobs skills and provide orientation to the school. A great deal of attention is paid to what instructional and non-instructional roles a paraprofessional should take, and it is generally concluded that the paraprofessional should not create or implement instruction outside the direct supervision of a licensed teacher (Chopra et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2007; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2002a; Giangreco, Ederlman, et al., 2001; Minondo et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Werts et al., 2004). Paraprofessionals report that being respected and acknowledged for the work they do is an important aspect of their job satisfaction (Chopra et al., 2004; Giangreco, Ederlman, et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). There exists conflicting findings regarding how best a paraprofessional should interact with students and staff, largely

depending on the nature and severity of individual student's disability (Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2010; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Werts, Zigmund, & Leeper, 2001). When teachers are allowed to collaborate with paraprofessionals, all aspects of the paraprofessionals work, from direct services to supervision and training improve (Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001). It is well documented that general and special education teachers do not feel qualified to supervise paraprofessionals (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001); and in one study, nearly 40% of paraprofessionals reported not participating in any type of formal performance evaluation (Carter et al., 2009). The remaining topics covered by the literature, which include: the student's perspective on paraprofessional support, paraprofessionals as a part of school change, and alternatives to the use of paraprofessionals, are not covered in this chapter as the topics are not applicable to the design or findings of this study.

The academic research calls for extending what is currently known in two ways. First, researchers suggest the field should further explore whether or not services provided to students by paraprofessionals result in a denial of FAPE, as other students receive all of their instruction from licensed teachers. Second, the research community calls for studies linking paraprofessional involvement with student outcomes, specifically standardized test scores. It is the opinion of this researcher, and the aim of this project, to explore a different aspect of the work of paraprofessionals. Regardless of the questions surrounding paraprofessional support, FAPE and outcomes, the paraprofessional is an important professional role in our schools. There is little to suggest that the nation's schools will cease to utilize this professional position in the coming years. With this realization, it is necessary to explore how paraprofessionals are being trained to carry out their responsibilities and how they are supervised in this process. The literature provides little contextual information regarding how supervision and training occurs at the district and building level. It is the purpose of this study to develop that context. While the

nature and effects paraprofessional work, training and supervision are the focal points of the research, other aspects, presented above, will be considered as the evidence allows.

Findings

Training

Practices related to training were explored through the perspective to two competing notions. First, training and supervision that is conducted in a systematic manner, for all paraprofessionals, and supported by teachers and administrators is the ideal model (Breton, 2010; Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco et al., 2010). Also important to this study is the rival notion that teachers and administrators implement training and supervision without design or commitment. It is clear through the analysis and triangulation of multiple data sources, including sixteen interviews and fourteen paper records, that the district has a commitment to systematic training for all paraprofessionals and supports these efforts with time and resources. It is also clear that teachers and administrators have the ability to implement as-needed training when issues or service dictate additional skills for the paraprofessional to engage in their work. This commitment to district-wide, building level, and as-needed training supports the theory that paraprofessionals support is an important aspect of social and academic inclusion of students in elementary schools. However, within these findings, exist expressions of frustration regarding the process of paraprofessional training provided by the district. Respondents claims, that they have little knowledge of the district-wide training that is provided to paraprofessionals, have no voice in the selection of training topics, and that there is little means of evaluating the effects of this training. Further, responds differ between the embedded units, Building A and Building B, regarding how paraprofessionals are include in building level training. These additional findings

fail to fully support the rival theory that training is implemented without design or support, but do point to concerns related to that claim.

Findings related to the training of paraprofessionals can be broken into five sections. First, training that is provided at the district level, and governed by state reimbursement guidelines. Second, training that is provided at the building level, based on practices established by the building administrator. Third, training that is provided on an as-needed basis, directed towards the service of individual students. Fourth a review of the topics that are presented in all three phases of training. And, finally, the perceptions of all participants regarding the training processes, is considered.

District-wide Training. The district demonstrated a commitment to paraprofessional training through time and resources. Primary resources were two district-wide paraprofessional trainers. Both trainers balanced this responsibility along with other duties. They plan and conduct trainings at the beginning of the school year, and throughout the year, so that paraprofessionals may satisfy the minimum number of training hours required by state reimbursement guidelines. In the same fashion as NCLB, the state is concerned with the qualifications and training of paraprofessionals working in Title I buildings and programs, but does not provide guidance for those paraprofessionals working in other programs. However, state reimbursement guidelines offer guidance to special education directors based on the number of training hours a paraprofessional should log each year, which is dependent on their years of experience. Paraprofessionals in the position for less than three years are required to have a minimum of 20 hours of training. Paraprofessionals in the position for more than three years are required to have a minimum of 10 hours of annual training. Those paraprofessionals who hold a teaching license are required to participate in a minimum of 8 hours of training.

Opportunities to participate in trainings are provided at the district levels in many ways. First, each year the district paraprofessional trainers offer a back-to-school training for both continuing paraprofessionals and beginning paraprofessionals. Specific training is provided to new paraprofessionals. Throughout the year, the team implements trainings covering various topics on in-service days and at the end of workdays. Face-to-face trainings, videos, and on-line modules are utilized for the delivery of trainings to paraprofessionals, although certain on-line opportunities are limited to paraprofessionals working in specific programs. Paraprofessionals have a choice in what trainings they participate in, but are responsible for maintaining their minimum training hour requirements each year. One of the district paraprofessional trainers monitors training hours and provides each paraprofessional with a monthly audit of their existing, and needed, hours. Recently, there has been a shift in practice at the district level to utilize days in which students do not attend school to provide training for paraprofessionals. This practice has been met with mixed reviews by paraprofessionals. Some would rather have the day off with their children, but all reported a willingness to participate if the trainings provided useful information.

Building-level Training. Each building handles ongoing staff development in a similar manner, but they use different names to describe the process. In Building A, a weekly, Friday morning meeting is referred to as Collective Inquiry (CI). During this time, the staff is educated together on topics related to all aspects of work in the building. It is the expectation that paraprofessionals attend these CI meetings, but if a topic does not pertain to them, they are notified and excused. Paraprofessionals reported this process of notification is not always handled consistently, but that they have a desire to be a part of the meeting regardless. Across the district, in Building B, a similar Friday meeting has been implemented, but it is not called CI. This principal has not required paraprofessional to attend the meeting unless it particularly

pertains to their work. The paraprofessionals reported similar concerns related to the communication regarding their involvement in the meetings and wished they could hear about these topics in a more proactive manner, instead of being notified by a teacher informally. The principal identified this issue as one that needs attention and commented that she hopes to include paraprofessionals in this meeting more frequently in the future. With the implementation of these Friday meetings, individual school buildings do not have a great deal of time to provide training to teachers in other formats. District in-service days are handled outside the building. The special education teachers are responsible for day-to-day modeling and training of the paraprofessionals on tasks and skills directly related to the work of the paraprofessional. This process will be discussed further, below.

As-needed Training. When a new skill or service is necessary to meet the needs of a class or individual students, paraprofessionals must receive training outside of the district and building level processes described above. Respondents indicated multiple structures are in place for the delivery of this type of training, although its organization is somewhat looser than the more formal process at the district and building level. The district employs multiple experts in various capacities and these individuals may be called upon to offer training programs before or after school, or even as a part of the paraprofessionals work with students. Special education teachers reported that they are central to this type of training for their paraprofessionals. Regular education teachers indicated that if they identify a training need for a paraprofessional working in their classroom that they would contact the special education teacher to organize the training. Building principals acknowledged this process and reported the ability to access structures to secure additional trainings on an as-needed basis.

Training Topics. As a means of qualifying the topics covered in paraprofessional training, each paraprofessional and district paraprofessional trainer was asked questions related

to training topics based on the Council for Exceptional Children's recommendation for the training that a paraprofessional should receive before beginning work (Carter et al., 2009). Responses to these questions were triangulated between the paraprofessionals, the district paraprofessional trainers and paper documentation of training agendas and materials. Findings are listed on table 4.1, above. When asked if the training was provided, or received, and evident in documentation, consensus or near consensus was established in eight of the fifteen training topics, including: ethical practices for confidential communication; effects a disability can have on a student's life; basic educational terminology regarding students, programs, rules and instructional activities; rules and procedural safeguards regarding management of student behavior; basic instructional and remedial strategies and materials; common concerns of families and students with disabilities; basic technologies appropriate to students with disabilities; and rationale for assessment. Findings related to the other seven topics were mixed, except in the case of roles of educational team members in planning an IEP, on which the district paraprofessional trainers indicated training was provided, but that all four paraprofessionals did not remember receiving such training, although they did all comment that they were not involved in the IEP planning process.

Perception of Training. Each respondent provided their perception of the processes in place for the training of paraprofessionals within the district. The central office administrators stated the importance of training and a desire to include paraprofessionals alongside general and special education teachers in more staff development activities. Resources, both in terms of dollars and time, remain the primary barriers to this type of change. The special education coordinator pointed out that there was a great deal of human capital and expertise in the district, and that other professionals could become involved in the delivery of training activities. Building level administrators were aware of the training processes in place, but wanted to know

more about what information was covered in the training sessions, and how to collaborate with district paraprofessional trainers in the identification of topics for future trainings. They also saw the value of training paraprofessionals along with general and special education teachers. Likewise, the teachers were aware of the process, but wanted more information and a greater voice in the planning of training topics. The teachers were critical, in some cases, as the training did not particularly relate to the actual work of the paraprofessionals. One teacher was especially critical of the on-line training modules; her observation was that paraprofessionals did not complete these activities with the spirit of learning the skills, but of answering questions in order to receive credit. The paraprofessionals were comfortable in the training they were receiving and confident that they had, or would be given, the opportunity to learn any necessary skill. They noticed the expansion of training opportunities in recent years, but were frustrated when these training did not provide valuable resources. One paraprofessional began her work in the middle of an academic year and was not provided with face-to-face training to orient her to the position or school; she was critical of this fact. She also hoped that future training activities would include the ability to role-play new skills. There was a call for a means of providing feedback to anyone conducting training based on the quality of each training session through an evaluation or survey.

Supervision

Practices related to supervisions are viewed through two competing notions. First NCLB and IDEA set forth the notion that qualified paraprofessionals should be hired and adequately trained and supervised to perform appropriate tasks in the delivery of special education services. This involves establishing guidelines for training, discussed above, and the assignment of tasks that are appropriately supervised by licensed teachers. Also, paraprofessionals must participate

in an established evaluations process on an annual basis. Empirical literature suggests, the rival theory, that paraprofessionals are engaging in increasingly instructional tasks outside of the supervision of licensed teachers (Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco et al., 2009) and in one study, 40% of paraprofessionals report not participating in any type of performance evaluation (Carter et al., 2009). Findings related to supervision support the first theory, that a system for hiring qualified paraprofessionals and supervising them in both a summative and formative manner exist within the district. Also, that paraprofessionals perform tasks appropriate to their work and do so under the supervision of licensed teachers. Little support exists in either of the embedded units for the rival theory, as all paraprofessionals report similar findings related to the nature and type of their day-to-day tasks, the supervision they receive from both general and special education teachers, as well as uniform participation in annual performance reviews. Only one paraprofessional from Building A, reports designing instructional activities, but he holds a teaching license. Criticism is reported by the second paraprofessional from Build B, as the special education teacher who supervises her work does not protect the time set aside for formative supervision on a daily and weekly basis. This evidence does support the rival theory and illustrates that even with the necessary structure and support, all professionals must be committed to the process of supervision at all levels.

The study demonstrates that supervision of paraprofessionals is a complex process that exists on multiple levels. First, there is summative supervision, or the formal evaluation process each paraprofessional participates in each year. Second, the more complex process of supervision is that of formative supervision, or the day-to-day process of modeling, guiding and teaching that general and special education teachers engage in with the paraprofessionals. Issues related to the chain of command paraprofessionals follow to voice concerns came up in nearly all

of the respondent interviews and are considered here. Finally, the process for assigning paraprofessionals is discussed.

Summative Supervision. The process of summative supervision is straight-forward. All respondents recognized that the process occurs annually for each paraprofessional, and all four paraprofessionals reported participating in an annual evaluation, conducted by the special education teacher and witnessed by the building administrator. The evaluation is based on a set of performance expectations, which are provided to paraprofessionals and were included in document analysis.

Only two issues were identified with the process. First, general education teachers recognized that their role was not to evaluate the paraprofessional, but cited that they were only formally solicited for feedback regarding paraprofessional performance if the administration was collecting data necessary to terminate a paraprofessional. The general education teachers reported a desire to be more involved in providing feedback in the development of the evaluation document, but also reported providing frequent informal feedback to the supervising special education teacher regarding the work of a paraprofessional. They also acknowledged that if there were a more significant issue regarding a paraprofessional's work, a structure for feedback would be in place. One of the special education teachers suggested that the evaluation process not be conducted once, at the end of the school year, but more frequently, throughout the year, so that a focus could be placed on the professional growth of individual paraprofessionals.

Formative Supervision. Formative supervision is a more complex process, which involves the day-to-day monitoring, modeling, and guiding of the work of the paraprofessional by the general and special education teacher. It is widely cited in the literature that new teachers do not feel comfortable in this process and all of the general and special education teachers, as well as three of the administrators, reported feeling ill-equipped to handle this task early in their

professional careers. The topic is so prevalent that the special education director built specific trainings on the topic into the new teacher workshops held for general and special education teachers each year. Each of the teacher respondents described their process and opinions about the formative supervision of paraprofessionals at great length. While their specific actions varied in some ways, each teacher reported a focus on four key points: communication, collaboration, commitment, and trust.

The ability to communicate with the paraprofessional was seen to be essential to the process. Communication can be written, or done face-to-face, but it must happen. One paraprofessional reported that her supervising special education teacher was not effective in communication and this impacted all aspects of their working relationship. Along with communication, the teacher must also be organized. Knowing what is going to happen each day, or week, is essential in order to communicate those items in a timely manner. How this communication occurs is directly impacted by how the teacher collaborates with the paraprofessional. One special education teacher, who works alongside her paraprofessional and engages in constant communication, reported that they are able to ‘plan on the fly,’ and react as needs change from day-to-day and week-to-week.

Collaboration can also occur in writing. Two special education teachers reported relying heavily on written communication through written lessons and emails to share issues, changes, and concerns with the paraprofessional. One special education teacher sends an email each week, on Sunday evening, to update her paraprofessionals on the week ahead. Collaboration is different for the general education teachers who utilize paraprofessional supports within her classroom. One general education teacher from Building B reported visiting with the paraprofessional each morning regarding the day and deciding, together, how students should be

served. Through this process, she developed a very team driven, collaborative, approach with the paraprofessional assigned to her classroom.

It takes commitment on the part of the teacher to effectively communicate and collaborate with the paraprofessional. One must protect the time set aside for communication and collaboration, as well as engage in the process. Special education teachers in Building A reported having to fight to make this time available, while the respondents from Building B reported that time is built into each day for the teachers to collaborate with the paraprofessionals. One paraprofessional from Building B reported that her teacher was often busy with other responsibilities during this time and that she worked hard to not bother the teacher. This lack of commitment was portrayed in a negative light.

When communication, collaboration, and commitment are implemented effectively, a great deal of trust and rapport is developed between the teacher and paraprofessional. All parties commented that this trust takes time to develop, sometimes as much as a full school year. The paraprofessionals look to the teacher for guidance and watch the teacher to learn how to implement instruction and engage with the student. They see the relationship as an essential component of formative supervision.

Chain of Command. The chain of command, or communication process, paraprofessionals follow to express concerns was not a topic the researcher identified as necessary to cover, before the onset of the data collection phase of this work. In the first interview, the topic emerged and continued to be discussed through the remaining interviews. While there is some variance in how participants responded concerning knowledge of the communication process or how they had, or might, interact if issues developed, all respondents reported that a paraprofessional would begin with the regular or general education teacher and then the principal, if issues could not be resolved with the teacher. Only the most flagrant issues

would require communication above the principal. One teacher cautioned that the paraprofessional should be very careful in taking an issue with their supervising special education to another special education teacher.

Some variance did exist in how respondents would handle issues between Building A and Building B. Those respondents from Building B noted that the principal covers the topic of how issues are to be handled with the building staff frequently and that she sets very specific guidelines for her staff. In the review of documents related to paraprofessional trainings, a sheet specifying who or where a paraprofessional should seek additional information across multiple topics was present. It was curious that throughout the attention to this topic in interviews, the document was not mentioned by any of the respondents.

Paraprofessional Assignment. Paraprofessionals are assigned to buildings for work in the delivery of special education services in an inclusive model based on a formula, which is implemented district wide. One paraprofessional is assigned for every three students with significant disabilities, and one paraprofessional is assigned for every seven students with mild to moderate disabilities. There is a process by which a building administrator may request additional paraprofessional support. Both principals indicated they were aware of this formula, and the process, but had not experienced a situation that required them to request additional support.

The district uses a model that designates Collaboration Classrooms and Collaboration Teachers. These teachers and classrooms serve all special education students at a particular grade level who receive inclusive services. This model allows for one or two teacher at each grade level to focus on including students with special education needs in their room. Paraprofessionals then work within the collaboration classrooms instead of moving to various rooms within grade levels. At the time of data collection, paraprofessionals were then assigned

to special education teachers, and services were organized through the special education department.

However, some change was occurring in this process in Building A, due to changes in the administration. Instead of having the special education teachers schedule services, the building leadership team was handling the master schedule and organizing the paraprofessional's time based on the overview of student need. Special education teachers would still be assigned for paraprofessionals for supervision. The principal from Building A expressed that there might be concerns about this change among the special education teachers and paraprofessionals, but when asked about this, the teachers and paraprofessionals reported that they would be able to continue in their work in a similar manner to the past, and that this change was not an issue. One special education teacher even commented that she was happy to have the scheduling process handled by the building leadership team.

Hiring and Retention

Findings related to hiring and retention can also be view through two competing notions. First NCLB and IDEA set forth that qualified paraprofessionals should be hired to deliver special education services, but the literature provides the competing notion that the hiring of qualified paraprofessionals is a challenging process (Giangreco et al., 2010). Findings in this study overwhelmingly support the initial notion, as all respondents report that the labor market provides more than enough adequately qualified candidates to fill open positions as paraprofessionals. The paraprofessionals, themselves, having all worked in the district over a number of years and speak only of issues related to professional fit as a challenging for hiring qualified paraprofessionals.

Academic research points to challenges in the process of hiring and retaining qualified paraprofessionals. When asked if this was a challenge for Building A and B, fifteen of the sixteen respondents suggested that it was not, and that there were more qualified applicants than positions. So much so, that one principal delayed the hiring of paraprofessionals, in an attempt to attract licensed teachers who had not secured a certified position due to the current teacher labor market. The other principal had not experienced issues in hiring qualified paraprofessionals as potential hires came to her after hearing about the potential of open positions through other members of the school staff.

Concerns related to hiring paraprofessionals came from teachers and paraprofessionals who indicated that just because a candidate was qualified on paper that did not always correlate with a good professional fit within a school or grade level team. Instances when someone was hired who seemed well qualified, but did not work out due to fit, were shared. Factors associated with the district's ability to attract candidates for open paraprofessional positions include competitive pay and benefits, as well as the factors associated with all paraprofessional positions, including working close to home and a job with a similar schedule to that of school aged children.

Respect and Acknowledgement

Findings related to respect and acknowledgement are considered between the notion that paraprofessionals are essential to the work of schools and the competing notion that paraprofessionals are the forgotten members of the education team (Pickett et al., 2003). Evidence from this study suggest that the paraprofessionals feel well supported in their work, lending strength for the first notion, but differences in levels of respect do differ between the two embedded units.

All four paraprofessionals reported satisfying experience in the work place. Each expressed that their work was important and valued by the school community. Subtle differences between buildings did exist. Each respondent from Building B shared the philosophy, set by the principal, that all members of the school staff were the teachers of children and that they were treated as such. This related to positive regard for the principal and appeared to correlate to overall satisfaction with their work. In the case of the general education teacher and the first paraprofessional from Building A, the applied practice of this philosophy resulted in a collaborative relationship that was highly valued by both sides of the relationship. So much so, that the general education teacher expressed dismay at the thought that the paraprofessional might not be paired with her in the coming school year.

Respondents from Building B also shared their experience of a paraprofessional appreciation week. The special education teacher, who saw the need to honor paraprofessionals after celebrating teacher appreciation week, constructed this series of activities. While the two special education teachers created the activity, all of the building's staff and students participated in the celebration. When asked about the origin of this culture in Building B, all respondents from that building suggested, without hesitation, that the principal was responsible. Similar instances or specific comments were not made by respondents from Building A when this was explored through interview questions. Participants from Building A did report that recent changes in building leadership related to the development of school culture, but they felt positive about the new school leaders.

Roles and Responsibilities

The appropriate role of paraprofessionals is widely considered in academic literature. The field supports the notion that a paraprofessionals should be involved in providing academic

support to students while being supervised by licensed teachers, yet practice reveals that the role of paraprofessionals is becoming more and more instructional and outside the purview of licensed teachers (Chopra et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2007; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2002a; Giangreco, Ederlman, et al., 2001; Minondo et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Werts et al., 2004). These competing ideas provide the conceptual framework for understanding the roles and responsibilities in this case study. Overwhelmingly findings, support the initial notion that paraprofessionals are engaging in support roles in both the Collaboration Room and Discovery Center under the supervision of licensed teachers. Respondents report that academic content is being designed by the teacher in each embedded unit, except in instances where the paraprofessional is a licensed teacher.

Each paraprofessional and teacher was asked about the day-to-day activities of the paraprofessional, as a means of establishing what professional responsibilities paraprofessionals performed within the district. These roles can be divided into instructional and non-instructional activities. When paraprofessionals were working to support students, they were doing so in three ways. First, they worked within a classroom, supporting a special education teacher in a variety of ways. Second, they could be working with a small group of students, in or near, the general education classroom as a means of supporting academic or behavioral tasks with students, apart from their whole class. Third, paraprofessionals provided small group support in the Discovery Room (DR) to support academic or behavioral practices in addition to lessons in the general education classroom. When not engaged in academic support, the paraprofessionals each had duties related to supervision within the school. Types of supervision varied, but primarily included lunch duty and car-loop duty, or the supervision of student pick-up and drop-off. These non-instructional duties were limited to one hour per day, based on state guidelines limiting the time a paraprofessional may engage in the delivery of non-special education related services.

Administrators at the building level reported that it is essential to the schedule of the school that paraprofessionals participate in these non-instructional duties.

All four paraprofessionals and the general and special education teachers reported that the primary developer of instructional activities was either the general or special education teacher. In one case, a paraprofessional was a licensed teacher, with a 30-year career as a classroom teacher. This paraprofessional was provided with more latitude related to instructional content, seemingly never developing lessons, but given the ability to adapt specific activities. It was also noted that when paraprofessionals worked within a general education classroom, that they provided support to all students, and not just students receiving special education services.

Interactions of Paraprofessionals with Student and Staff

Two issues are present within the academic literature related to paraprofessional's interactions with students and staff. First evidence indicates that paraprofessional proximity results in more student interaction, which provides the first theory in the conceptual framework for understanding the interactions of paraprofessionals with students and staff. The second, rival theory is supported by conflicting evidence that suggests close proximity of the paraprofessional to the student receiving special education services limits the number and quality of interactions the student has with peers. This study does not provide evidence to support either of these claims, but the practice of one special education teacher from Building A is to rotate paraprofessionals between students when services are delivered outside of the general education classroom or in the DR. She expressed that she does not like a paraprofessional working with a set of students for more than a week at one time. She believes this practice reduces any learned dependence on the part of the student, and that with this system in place, the student will perform for multiple members of the school staff.

Regarding their interactions with staff, the research indicates that teachers provide more supervision, training, and support, and work in a more collaborative manner when paraprofessionals are assigned to classrooms, instead of individual students. This research also describes general education teachers as being more involved with students receiving special education services when the paraprofessional is engaged with the entire class (Giangreco, Broer, et al., 2001). These findings support the first notion in the conceptual framework for understanding paraprofessional interactions with staff. The research claiming that teachers do not feel qualified to supervise paraprofessionals provides support for the rival notion (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001). This study supports findings related to the first notion in the model of pairing paraprofessionals with Collaboration Teachers. The relationships articulated by the general education teacher from Building B and the first paraprofessional from that building are reported as strong and supportive. The team collaborates well and both members report a great deal of satisfaction in their work based on this collaboration. While respondents report not feeling well prepared to supervise and support the work of paraprofessionals early in their career, these skills developed over time and they are now comfortable in this process. It would be dangerous to view these findings as supports for the rival claim as support is provided to new teachers in the development of skills towards collaborating with paraprofessionals.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training and supervision in an inclusive elementary setting, from the perspective of the key players involved in the paraprofessional training and supervision process. Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter II and the findings, presented above, relative to the perspective of the

professionals that participated in the present study, the following conclusions can be drawn about the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training and supervision in an inclusive elementary setting. These findings are interpreted using the conceptual framework of the theory that paraprofessionals are an important aspect of the social and academic inclusion of elementary students when paraprofessionals are properly trained and supervised and the rival theory, that paraprofessional work does not provide the needed social and academic support for successful inclusion and moreover, hinders social and academic inclusion because paraprofessional work is poorly defined, training is limited and teachers are not prepared to provide necessary supervision.

First, training is provided in a resource-supported, systematic process for all paraprofessionals, across multiple levels. These trainings include opportunities at the district and building level, as well as, those provided on an as-needed basis based on specific skill sets and student needs. Two professionals have job duties, which include the development and implementation of these training protocols, as well as, monitoring the progress of paraprofessionals towards the completion of the minimum annual training hour requirements established by state funding reimbursement guidelines. Multiple opportunities exist during the school year to meet these training requirements, which include a variety of formats, including face-to-face training, video productions, and online modules. Specific practices exist within each school building to provide further staff development to members of the building team on a weekly basis, although paraprofessional participation in these opportunities varies by building. Finally, administrators and teachers have the resources and processes at their disposal to secure additional training for paraprofessionals as-needed, based on specific skills or student service needs. These findings support the first theory, but the rival theory is strengthened as respondents voice that they have little knowledge of, or voice in the development of training opportunities.

Additionally, respondents suggest there is no means of evaluating provided trainings. The support for the initial theory is strong. This research shows that when the necessary supports are established and implemented for paraprofessional training the dangers of the rival theory may be avoided. Support for the rival notion above may serve as a means to improve such training protocol.

Second, supervision to paraprofessionals is a complex process that involves multiple structures, many of which are not governed by policy and practice. Summative supervision is the process paraprofessionals are provided for their annual performance evaluation. All paraprofessionals participate in the process, developed by their supervising special education teacher, and witnessed by a building level administrator. Formative supervision, which involves the day-to-day supervising, modeling, training and guiding within the context of the working relationships between the teacher and paraprofessional, is more complex, and more difficult to implement and govern through policy and practice. The presence and universal participation in both the summative and formative supervision process is strong evidence supporting the first theory in the conceptual framework of this study.

Generally this formative supervision must include significant communication between the teacher and paraprofessional. Also present is the practice of collaboration between the teacher and paraprofessional, both in terms of the actual work of supporting students, and planning for that support. A deep commitment to communication and collaboration is important to both parties in this relationship. This commitment means engaging in and preparing for communication and collaboration, as well as protecting the time necessary for these tasks. When these three factors come together, a relationship of trust and rapport develops between the teacher and paraprofessional, which results not only in quality services for students, but also a satisfying experience for the professionals. One respondents comments related to her

supervising special education teacher not protecting the time necessary to participate in this type of collaboration provides some support for the second, rival, theory in the conceptual framework, but does not over shadow the strong support from the other participants regarding the commitment of the district and buildings to provide and protect the time necessary to engage in this type of collaboration.

Aside from, but linked to this formative supervision, is the chain of command, or communication path for paraprofessionals. A process by which paraprofessionals seek answers to questions related to schedules, duties, students and procedures is clearly articulated. A similar process for communicating concerns related to their supervisor or collaboration teacher is also established. Confusion regarding this chain of command provides support for the rival theory in the conceptual framework. Statements related to the chain of command must be balanced by evidence from supporting documents demonstrating training on the topic and established, published matrix regarding how paraprofessionals should seek additional information regarding a number of issues inherent to their work.

Third, although perspective and experience differs between respondents, each acknowledged the presence and importance of the training process, some offering specific suggestions for improvement, as discussed below. Each participant also demonstrated knowledge of, participation in, and a commitment to, their respective roles in both the summative and formative supervision processes in which administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals engage. As with training, respondents offered statements of support and areas for improvement related to supervision; they are discussed below. The experience of each participant offers a blueprint for administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals as they consider supervision and training from the perspective of both policy and practice.

Based on these conclusions about the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training and supervision in an inclusive elementary schools identified as an ideal type, the following recommendations are offered to policy makers and practitioners concerned with the development of training and supervision process for paraprofessionals.

First, trainings related to specific skills, as well as orientation to the school district and individual building, should be developed and supported for all paraprofessionals. Training modules and practices should be reviewed annually, and updated based on changes in need. Specific attention should be made to feedback loops concerning training. Both in terms of all invested parties having a voice in the identification and development of training topics, but also as a vehicle for participants to provide feedback related to the value of specific trainings.

One should acknowledge that experience relates to knowledge, as this position is supported through reimbursement guidelines, at least in the state where the study was completed. As a paraprofessional engages in more than three years of professional practice their minimum training requirements are cut in half, from twenty to ten hours. In instances when paraprofessionals hold a teaching license, these minimum requirements are further reduced to eight hours. The development of training activities should reflect this reality developing a specific set of training opportunities concerning issues critical to all paraprofessionals and other, skill-based, activities for those paraprofessionals requiring additional hours. Training topics should also be developed based on established standards and practices, perhaps those established by the CEC. Support should be provided to building level programs for staff development so that, when appropriate, paraprofessionals are trained alongside general and special education teachers. Finally, a process for building administrators and teachers to access additional training based on the need to enhance skills or provide services to students should be established.

Second, specific processes for summative supervision, formative supervision, the chain of command, and assignment of paraprofessionals should be implemented. Summative supervision, or a review of performance, linked to established paraprofessional expectations is necessary for all paraprofessionals. Consideration should be given to how often this review process is implemented. At a minimum, a paraprofessional should participate in an annual review of performance, but expanding that evaluation to multiple times per year may be beneficial especially for paraprofessionals new to the position. A formal process of soliciting feedback from general education teachers working with paraprofessionals should also be considered. Training provided to administrators and special education teachers related to the supervision and review of classified staff should also be implemented, as the rules that govern certified and classified staff may be different. Beginning teachers may not feel comfortable in the role of supervisor to paraprofessionals. Including training on this topic in new teacher workshops should be considered. Building administrators should also be aware of this discomfort, and work to mentor new teachers in the supervision process.

Third, formative supervision is much more complex and harder to manage from a policy perspective. It is necessary to establish time for the special education teacher and paraprofessional to collaborate on a weekly or daily basis. From the teacher and paraprofessional's perspective, an understanding of interpersonal communication, adult learning styles, the process of collaboration, and a commitment to these processes should be considered. Trust and rapport are important between teacher and paraprofessional. A commitment to communication and collaboration served professionals well towards building this trust and rapport. Paraprofessionals should seek opportunities to work with both the general and special education teachers towards the goals of learning from their actions and enhancing their interpersonal relationships. Finally, paraprofessionals should be assigned to classrooms and

specific students in an inclusive model. The practice of utilizing the Collaboration Room found in this study, supports past research, indicating that general education teachers are more involved with the education of students with disabilities placed in their classrooms and in the supervision and development of paraprofessionals assigned the rooms.

While not related to the purpose of this study, the evidence provided findings related to other aspects of paraprofessional work and are included as findings. First, it is not always difficult to hire and retain paraprofessionals. This labor market supported more paraprofessional candidates than positions. In this situation, it is important to understand that not all qualified candidates will offer a strong fit to the program; candidate selection should include this consideration. Secondly, strong building culture, where all members of the education team are treated like teachers, related to paraprofessionals feeling respected and acknowledged for their work. Third, paraprofessionals should engage only in work that is supervised by a licensed teacher and that does not involve the development of instructional materials. When engaged in non-instructional tasks, any policies limiting the paraprofessional role should be honored.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided descriptive and analytic analysis of the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training and supervision in inclusive elementary schools selected as ideal models. Descriptive findings would have been strengthened if the perspective of each elementary attendance center within the district instead of the two that served as imbedded units had been considered. Also, had the study been expanded to include paraprofessionals working in an inclusive setting at the middle or high school levels, findings would be more robust. Third, findings associated with the training and supervision of paraprofessionals working in self-contained or center-based special education programs would have benefited the overall

understanding of the process of the school district. Further research should study the nature and effects of training and supervision provided to paraprofessionals across the whole of a school district.

Another limitation concerns sampling. Given that the researcher only interviewed personnel who volunteered to provide evidence to complete the case study, findings are limited to the perspectives of these professionals. The study would have been enhanced by including the perspective of each paraprofessional from both attendance centers and all of the special education teachers and collaborative general education teachers. Interviews with paraprofessionals and teachers, who were not returning to the profession, the district, or the building, might also have enhanced findings. Also absent from this study is the perspective of families with students involved in inclusive special education services. Future research should seek to expand interviews to all members of a building staff, including paraprofessionals and teachers not returning to the building, as well as families.

Furthermore, observation of all training activities conducted in the district would have yielded valuable firsthand knowledge of those proceedings and the interactions of trainers, paraprofessionals, teachers and administrators in them. Although such observations were not possible in the present study, given time and resources, future research should include them.

Analytic generalizations are limited as the research design utilized a single case model with two imbedded units. Had the researcher conducted a study of multiple cases, cross-case analysis might have yielded results that could be generalized. It was not the aim this study to report findings regarding the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, supervision and training in all inclusive elementary settings, but rather, to explore and create needed context supporting one case identified as ideal.

Finally, although beyond the resources of this study, future research on the nature and effects of paraprofessional work, training and supervision in an inclusive, elementary setting should collect comparative data in urban and rural school districts, and with regard to training and supervision, identify structures and processes for further comparison.

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Appendix A

Permission to Conduct Researching



Unified School District 232

Department of Special Services

Joan Robbins, Ph.D.
Director of Special Services

April 20, 2012

To: Matthew Ramsey, Benedictine College
KU Human Subjects Committee

Matthew Ramsey has provided information about his research study to USD 232 and we are willing to participate in this project.

We look forward to working with Mr. Ramsey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Robbins".

Joan Robbins, Ph.D.

Appendix B

HSC Approval Statement and Informed Consent Document



5/22/2012
HSCL #20168

Matthew Ramsey
1146 Atchison St.
Atchison, KS 66002

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) has received your response to its expedited review of your research project

20168 Ramsay/Imber (ELPS) A Case Study Analysis of Paraprofessional Work, Training and Supervision in Inclusive Elementary Schools

and approved this project under the expedited procedure provided in 45 CFR 46.110 (f) (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your consent form must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the consent form(s) sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hscl/hsp_tutorial/000.shtml.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of

consent.

6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Dyson Elms
Coordinator Human Subjects Committee Lawrence

cc: Michael Imber

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL). Approval expires one year from 5/22/2012 HSCL # 20168

University of Kansas

Informed Consent Statement

A Case Study Analysis of Paraprofessional Work, Training and Supervision in Inclusive Elementary Schools

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the nature and effects of training and supervision provided to paraprofessionals working towards including students with high incident disabilities in the elementary inclusive classroom from the perspective of paraprofessionals, teachers, school psychologists and school administrators involved in the process.

PROCEDURES

By giving your written consent to participate in the study, you are consenting to (a) be interviewed for a maximum of two hours, (b) provide relevant documents, and/or (c) be available for follow up questions for a maximum of one hour. With your permission at the time of your interview(s), the interview will be audio recorded, and the recording will be erased after it is transcribed. If you do not give permission for such recording, it will not be done. All materials related to the study will be stored in a locked file cabinet within a lock office when not in use.

RISKS

There are no risks to you associated with participating in this study.

BENEFITS

The benefits of participating in this study include gaining a better understanding of the nature and effects of training and supervision provided to paraprofessionals. The benefit to you as a participant include better understanding the nature and effect of your work and a better understanding of the perceptions of others regarding training and supervision of paraprofessionals. The benefit to the academic community includes broadening the

understanding of the training and supervision of paraprofessionals in inclusive elementary schools.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

You may be paid for your time associated with your participation in this study at the rate of \$10 per hour, not to exceed \$30. Payments will be mailed to you in the form of a check after your interview session has been completed. You may choose not to accept payment for the your time associated with your participation. Investigators may ask for your social security number in order to comply with federal and state tax and accounting regulations.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Although names of individuals and agencies will be collected, they will not be used in any written reports of the findings of the study. Through use of a data coding system and pseudonyms, diligent effort will be made to preserve the anonymity of participants and agencies. However, absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed because it is possible that readers of the case study report might recognize participants and/or agencies by virtue of their independent knowledge of the research site and/or participants.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Matthew J. Ramsey, 1146 Atchison Street, Atchison, Kansas, 66002.

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name Date

Participant's Signature

Researcher Contact Information

Matthew J. Ramsey
Principal Investigator
1146 Atchison Street
Atchison, Kansas 66002
(913) 360-3382
mramsey@benedictine.edu

Michael Imber, Ph.D.
Faculty Supervisor
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Joseph R. Pearson Hall, Room 406
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045
785 864-9734
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Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Administrators, Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals—questions to paraprofessionals will center on their roles supporting special education students, as well as training and supervision they have received as a part of their work. Basic questions about their work and day-to-day activities will be considered. As trust is built, questions about frustrations, and the challenges they face, will be paired with inquiries about their successes and rewarding experiences. They will be asked what they might like to be different as a means of improving their work. Finally, they will be asked what suggestions they would offer to other paraprofessionals and future teachers related to training and supervision. Specific training issues include:

- Ethical practices for confidential communication about students with disabilities
- Characteristics of appropriate communication with other members of the education team
- Effects a disability can have on a student's life
- Basic educational terminology regarding students, programs, rules and instructional activities
- Purposes of programs for students with disabilities
- Personal cultural biases and differences that affect one's ability to work with others
- Rules and procedural safeguards regarding management of student behavior
- Indicators of abuse and neglect
- Basic instructional and remedial strategies and materials
- Common concerns of families and students with disabilities
- Demands of various learning environments
- Roles of educational team members in planning an IEP
- Rights and responsibilities of families and children as they relate to learning needs
- Basic technologies appropriate to students with disabilities
- Rationale for assessment

Teachers—questions to teachers will largely center on personal experiences working directly with paraprofessionals. How do paraprofessionals play a role in the classroom? What types of support the teacher offers the paraprofessional and what time, if any, the teacher uses to provide supervision. The means of supervision will be explored. Whether or not the paraprofessional is included in planning or decision-making will be considered. These quests will establish the roles of the paraprofessional as well as the training and supervision processes. Questions about specific successes and frustrations with the training and supervision processes will be posed. Whether or not the teacher feels adequately prepared and supported, as a supervisor will be explored, as necessary. The teacher will be asked about suggestions they would make to other teachers and paraprofessionals as well as any administrative barriers, which prevent them from adequately engaging in necessary training and supervision.

Administrators—interviews with principals will be very similar to that of the Special Education Director as they both have 'elite' status within the school organization. Questions will center on

structures and resources at their disposal for the training and supervision of paraprofessionals. These questions will drive primarily at the question of what control/authority do the building level administrators have in tailoring solutions to their specific school building. The building principal's perception of the process is also important. If hiring occurs at the building level, questions would be included about the quality of applicants. Questions about the pairing of paraprofessionals with teachers and/or students will be explored. Also questions regarding the supervisory role will be addressed. If special education teachers supervise paraprofessionals, is that role accounted for as the principal supervises the special education teachers? The principals will be asked for suggestions they would make to other principals, special education teachers, regular education teachers, and paraprofessionals. Also, questions related to any identified or perceived barriers they face in the process of training and supervision of paraprofessionals.

Appendix D

Document List

Document #1	Special Education Reimbursement Guide/State Categorical Aid
Document #2	Paraprofessional Employee Performance Review Guiding Document
Document #3a	Guidelines for Providing Substitutes for Paraprofessionals, 2010
Document #3b	Guidelines for Providing Substitutes for Paraprofessionals, 2011
Document #4	Communication Plan for Paraeducators
Document #5a	Working with Paraprofessionals: a guide for teachers
Document #5b	Guidelines for Teachers Working with Paraprofessionals, in-service presentation notes
Document #6	Request for Additional Special Education Staff form, blank and completed
Document #7	Orientation for Paraprofessionals agendas, August, 2011 and training materials
Document #8	Paraprofessional scheduling, sample document
Document #9	Approved websites for paraprofessional training
Document #10	Training Materials: Jonathan Mooney
Document #11	Training Materials: Metacognitive and Learning Strategies
Document #12	Training Materials: Para Jeopardy
Document #13	Training Materials and Agenda: AHDH
Document #14	Training Materials: New Paraprofessionals

Appendix E

Examples of Data Units

1. JR/sped director/6.9.12/D

Distinguish for me the difference between a para and a teacher's aide? You know as a Title 1 Aid, my actual title, I worked with kids who were struggling but had not been identified. The role was similar but not exactly the same.

2. JG/principal/6.12.12/H

So when you came, there were 7 paras in the building. Did you have much of a hand in sorting them out into classrooms and assignments? I didn't make changes to that this year to see how things went. We are making changes for next year where paras are not going to be assigned to a teacher, other for that evaluation piece, but they are going to go based on need, rather than grade level or teacher assignment. We started to make some headway with this because we had a large number of students show up in a grade level that we didn't have at the beginning of the year, and we need to shift some coverage out of their normal, what they've been accustomed to.

3. DC/para/6.12.12/F

The instruction you were providing, or practice you were providing? I received my instruction from my sped supervisor/teacher. She said this is what you were doing today. As the year went on, she said here is the lesson instead of going through and telling me this, this and this. She would give me time to prepare.

4. SG/sped coordinator/6.15.12/BI

Finally the para? For the paras. I think for any of them, but also for the paras, you are an important piece of the educational tool and no matter what your title is you are providing direct services to the child in order for them to receive FAPE and not to lose sight of how important that child is. During your day you are up and about working with the children. If you are sitting in the back, you have already passed that class; we need you up and helping. If you have questions don't be afraid to ask. It only takes one move in to change what you have been doing, and the only way to learn is to ask questions.

5. WS/para and trainer/J.B./adaptive specialist and trainer/6/14/12/C

If you were going to divide your role like a pie chart, how much time would you spend as a para with access? Willy: it depends on the day or week. I would say about 30%.

So the other 70% is spent in the administration of paras. That says to me that the district has a great commitment to providing support to paras with almost a full time person. Willy: yes. I also keep track of para and subs, which some weeks takes up 50% of my time. I send reports out. I send monthly reports to the coordinators and director.

6. TB/reg ed/6.15.12/Y

If you don't have a role in the summative process, what role do you have in the formative supervision that goes on all the time? I don't really feel like I'm formally

observing them or I'm reporting to Barb because I've never had an issue that I felt like I needed to report to Barb something that has happened.

7. BG/sped teacher/6.15.12/J

One of the things I've heard is that, as a para, they had x number of hours to fill depending on experience and some of that training felt like checking off hours and that it may not be directly related to their work. I think that might be the case. I know they do some training on-line, which they may get credit for, to me that is what I see them do that I feel like is maybe just a check off the list. I'm not sure that, I wouldn't say that they aren't benefiting from what they are getting, but it seems like they are going through it, in a mechanical training.

Appendix F

Coding System for Data Units

Each unit of information was given a series of letters and numbers.

1. The first code in the series defines the individual being interviewed.
2. The second code in the series indicates the participant's position in the study, using their professional title.
3. The third code indicates the date on which the interview was conducted.
4. The fifth code is an alphabetic character, which provides the order the unit has within the transcript from which it was taken.
5. Documents analyzed were sorted and assigned a number code, 1.14. In two cases subdocuments existed and were given a letter code, e.g.: Document 5a and Document 5b.

Appendix G

Data Taxonomy

1. Respondents
 - Professional Roles
 - Professional Experience

2. Cites
 - Building A
 - Building B
 - Personnel

3. The Labor Market
 - Applicants
 - Quality
 - Qualifications
 - Professional Fit
 - Hiring Practices

4. Building Culture
 - Building Change
 - Staff Change
 - Leadership Perspective

5. Professional Roles of the Paraprofessional
 - In-Class Support
 - Pull-Out Support
 - The Discovery Room

6. Training
 - District Wide Training
 - Building Level Training
 - As-Needed Training
 - Topics of Training
 - Perceptions of Training

7. Supervision
 - Summative Supervision
 - Termination of Paraprofessionals
 - Formative Supervision
 - Chain of Command
 - Paraprofessional Assignment
 - Non-instructional Duties

8. Advice Regarding Paraprofessionals

Appendix H

Validation Procedure Letter

February 13, 2013

Good day,

As you remember, we met back in June of 2012, and you completed an interview with me about the training and supervision provided to paraprofessionals in the school district. This is a topic that is not well covered in the academic literature and developing a case study provides valuable context for issues related to paraprofessional training and supervision. What I'm asking from you now, is to provide me feedback into the credibility, accuracy and anonymity of my case study.

Specifically, I'm asking you to read the draft case study and comment on:

- Credibility of the overall draft case study—do you feel the draft is a credible representation of how training and supervision happens in the district, even if you do not agree with every aspect of the draft case study? (We will deal separately with any issues you may have with specific parts of the draft case study below.)
- Errors interpretation—have I interpreted the information you provided correctly?
- Errors of facts—do I have any facts wrong?
- Breaches of anonymity—while you will know who has provided information based on your knowledge of the members of the education team, have I respected confidentiality?
- Errors in “qualifiers”-- in your view have I used a “qualifier” accurately (e.g., should some teachers be most teachers, or should many paraprofessionals by all paraprofessionals, or all administrators be some administrators). Please correct any inaccuracies that should be corrected.

I've provided a copy of my draft case study (marked with page and line numbers), as well as some review sheets that can be used to report errors of interpretation, errors of fact, breaches of anonymity, and inaccurate qualifiers. Simply note the page and line number(s) on the sheet and (a) identify the problem and, if possible (b) tell how you would correct it. Or, you may note such problems and corrections directly on the draft case study document by hand or using the tracking system if you are reviewing it electronically. If you'd like to schedule a meeting or phone conversation, after you have read the case study to share your comments, I am happy to take any changes in that fashion.

I know that your time is valuable. It is your input through this process that has made this project great. If you could have any changes to me by February 27th, I would appreciate it. If there is anything I can do to make the process simpler for you, please don't hesitate to call. (913) 360-3382.

Sincerely,
Matthew J. Ramsey

Appendix G

Revision Log

1. Page 9, line 13. Factual error. Building A is home to three special education teachers, instead of two.
2. Page 9, line 14. Note. A respondent commented that she was not sure the school psychologist was a member of the building administrative team. No change was made, as the school psychologist collaborated with the building principal, special education coordinator and special education director in decisions pertaining to the assignment of paraprofessionals, both in terms of the formula used to determine the number of paraprofessionals assigned to each building and the assignment of the paraprofessionals within the building.
3. Page 9, line 14. Error of interpretation. A respondent comment that as the school psychologist she did not see herself as an administrator, but did support the administration in various ways. This feedback with entry #2, justified a change in Page 9, line 14, reflected the understanding that school psychologist supports the administrative team, but is not an administrator.
4. Page 53, line 17-18. Error of interpretation. A respondent commented that the case study indicated she goes directly to the principal when she has problems with a paraprofessional or special education teacher. Instead, she felt the line ought to read that she feels she can go directly to the principal if she experiences an issue with a paraprofessional or special education teacher. The researcher agreed with the respondent's comment and changed the case study to reflect this new interpretation.
5. Page 62, line 9. Error of interpretation. A respondent commented that the statement 'them against' was intended to describe the relationship between the paraprofessionals and special education teachers, not the paraprofessionals and regular education teachers. The researcher agreed with the respondent's comments and changed the case study to reflect this new interpretation.