



Theses and Dissertations

---

2014-12-01

## Paraeducators' Perceptions of Their Responsibilities Based on the Utah Standards

Mary E. Buynak  
*Brigham Young University - Provo*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Counseling Psychology Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Buynak, Mary E., "Paraeducators' Perceptions of Their Responsibilities Based on the Utah Standards" (2014). *Theses and Dissertations*. 4359.  
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4359>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

Paraeducators' Perceptions of Their Responsibilities Based on the Utah Standards

Mary E. Buynak

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

Master of Science  
in  
Special Education

Betty Y. Ashbaker, Chair  
Tina T. Dyches  
Ellie L. Young

Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education

Brigham Young University

December 2014

Copyright © 2014 Mary E. Buynak

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### Paraeducators' Perceptions of Their Responsibilities Based on the Utah Standards

Mary Buynak

Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, BYU  
Master of Science

Paraeducators are increasingly involved in the education of students with disabilities. In order for paraeducators to properly work with this population, they must have adequate and ongoing training. Research has shown that paraeducators do not receive appropriate training in order to work with students with disabilities. The purpose of this study is to investigate the self-perceived knowledge of paraeducators working in special education and their level of training need. The study examines paraeducators' work environment, responsibilities, knowledge based on the Utah Standards for Paraeducators and perceived training needs. Ninety-five special education paraeducators working in a large, suburban school district in the intermountain west participated in a survey. The results of this research suggest that paraeducators desire training in areas of their assigned duties. Overall, they feel confident in their abilities but are open to learning more. This study suggests that there is not enough training for paraeducators who generally work with the most at-risk population in the school.

*Keywords:* paraeducator, special education standards, Utah

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am using this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who supported me in my academic pursuits.

I express my warm thanks to Dr. Betty Ashbaker for all of her support and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you for sharing your expertise and passion with me and for introducing me to the world of research.

A sincere thanks is given to Jerry Purles and the paraeducators from the Granite School District for their participation in this survey. This research is not possible without those paraeducators who spend countless hours helping students with disabilities.

I would also like to thank the faculty and staff in the Counseling Psychology and Special Education Department at BYU for believing in me and allowing me to grow. I appreciate the knowledge that has been shared with me in the field of special education and thank you for your commitment to education.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Statement of Problem.....	3
Statement of Purpose.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Method.....	5
Research Design.....	5
Participants.....	6
Demographics of district.....	6
Settings.....	7
Instruments.....	7
Section 1: Demographics.....	9
Section 2: Responsibilities.....	9
Section 3: Standards.....	9
Procedures.....	10
Data Collection and Analysis.....	11

Instrument Validity .....	11
Results.....	12
Research Question 1 .....	14
Research Question 2 .....	17
Research Question 3 .....	21
Summary of Results.....	22
Discussion.....	23
Limitations.....	27
Implications for Future Research.....	28
Implications for Practitioners.....	29
Conclusion .....	30
REFERENCES .....	31
Appendix A: Review of Literature .....	34
Definition of Paraeducators .....	34
Paraeducator Qualifications.....	36
The Responsibilities of Paraeducators .....	37
Supervision .....	40
Training.....	41
Law.....	41
Teacher.....	42

Paraeducator.....	42
Parents.....	43
Standards.....	44
Standard 1: Support instructional opportunities.....	46
Standard 2: Demonstrate professionalism and ethical practice.....	46
Standard 3: Support a positive learning environment.....	47
Standard 4: Communicate effectively and participate in the team process.....	47
Further Research.....	48
Appendix B: Informed Consent to Be a Research Subject.....	49
Survey Instructions.....	50
Appendix C: Survey.....	51
Appendix D: Survey Results.....	58
REFERENCES.....	65

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Paraeducator Demographics</i> .....	13
Table 2: <i>Instructional Support</i> .....	15
Table 3: <i>Clerical Support</i> .....	16
Table 4: <i>Physical Support</i> .....	16
Table 5: <i>Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 1: Support Instructional Opportunities</i> .....	18
Table 6: <i>Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 2: Demonstrate Professionalism and Ethical Practices</i> .....	19
Table 7: <i>Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 3: Support a Positive Learning Environment</i> .....	20
Table 8: <i>Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 4: Communicate Effectively &amp; Participate in the Team Process</i> .....	21
Table 9: <i>Desire for Training in Various Disciplines</i> .....	22
Table 10: <i>Paraeducator Responsibilities</i> .....	38
Table 11: <i>Results Paraeducators' Self-perceived Perceptions of Abilities</i> .....	58
Table 12: <i>Results Responsibilities of Paraeducators</i> .....	60
Table 13: <i>Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 1: Support Instructional Opportunities</i> .....	61
Table 14: <i>Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 2: Demonstrate Professionalism and Ethical Practices</i> .....	62
Table 15: <i>Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 3: Support a Positive Learning Environment</i> .....	63



Table 16: *Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 4:*  
*Communicate Effectively and Participate in the Team Process* ..... 64

Table 17: *Results Desire for Training in Various Disciplines* ..... 64

## DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis, *Paraeducators' Perceptions of Their Responsibilities Based on the Utah Standards*, is written in a hybrid format. This format is journal ready and adheres to the requirements for submission to a professional journal and the requirements of the university.

The literature review is included in Appendix A. Appendix B includes a consent form and survey instruction. Appendix C includes the survey, and the survey results are included in Appendix D.

## Introduction

Paraeducators, noncredentialed school employees who provide services to students with disabilities under the direction of licensed special education professionals, are spending an increasing amount of time working with students with disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2012; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003). The federal government has recognized the need for paraeducators in the classroom and has thus enacted laws that delineate their qualifications and responsibilities. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires paraeducators to be knowledgeable, be capable of providing instruction, and have earned a high school diploma or equivalent. Although the federal government has outlined basic qualifications, each state is responsible for the implementation and verification of the qualifications of paraeducators (NCLB, 2001). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), paraeducators are to be used in the education system with the intent that they are “appropriately trained and supervised” and they work to “assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities” (IDEA, 2004 Part B, Section 300 [b][2][iii]).

The IDEA 2004 states that paraeducators must be trained and outlines a requirement for policies to be in place for training. Required training leads to the need for paraeducator standards that describe necessary knowledge and skills. In order to adhere to standard requirements for paraeducators, special education teachers and other professionals in the school system must know what the standards entail. Although both NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) allow the use of paraeducators in the classroom, the laws outline only general roles and responsibilities for paraeducators. The data from the Fisher and Pleasants’ (2012) study indicates that there is a great need to clearly identify the role of paraeducators and to instruct them on their responsibilities.

Research supports the notion that paraeducators are involved in a wide variety of responsibilities throughout the day (Ashbaker, Young, & Morgan, 2001; Chopra et al., 2004; Daniels & McBride, 2001; Downing et al., 2000; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; French, 1998; Friend & Cook, 2010; Gaylord, Wallace, Pickett, & Likins, 2002; Moshoyannis, Pickett, & Granick, 1999; Pickett et al., 2003). However, there is a limited amount of research that measures paraeducators' perceptions of their qualifications for those responsibilities based on state-mandated standards. Clarification on how paraeducators perceive their roles and responsibilities can help school personnel "correct possible misconceptions, establish guidelines for performance, and provide the appropriate supervision and training" (Downing et al., 2000, p. 172).

Supervision of paraeducators by a licensed professional is a critical part of the federal laws. NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) indicate that a licensed professional must supervise the paraeducator and therefore a paraeducator cannot provide instructional support except under supervision of a professional, generally the teacher. In much of the research, paraeducators mention that they would like more training in order to perform their job effectively. Downing et al. (2000) interviewed paraeducators who work in inclusive settings to identify their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. The results of the study indicated that paraeducators thought that training was critical and that many received no training upon being hired. The paraeducators interviewed in this study identified a variety of areas in which they would like training:

- Behavioral interventions
- Specific disabilities and their effects on learning
- Strategies to collaborate
- Adaptations to curriculum

- Physical care
- Basic academic skills
- Computer skills
- Interpersonal skills

The crux of Downing's study helps special educators realize that "people who provide the support [need to be] well trained and supported by professionals" (Downing et al., 2000, p. 179). A study conducted by Chopra et al. (2004) unintentionally revealed the need paraeducators have for more training. Being unprepared for a job as a paraeducator due to lack of proper training was clearly a source of frustration. Participants in the interview indicated that a lack of training was one of the biggest concerns when working with paraeducators. Paraeducators in this study expressed the desire to receive more training in areas such as instructional duties, behavior, roles and responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships.

Utah has been on the forefront of training for paraeducators as well as creating standards for paraeducators (Pickett et al., 2003; USOE, 2003). However, little research has been done to measure the self-perceived knowledge and abilities of paraeducators, and no research has been conducted and reported in Utah regarding paraeducators self-perceived knowledge based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals (Utah State Office of Education [USOE], 2003). Paraeducators who understand these expectations—know what they are supposed to know and how they are to act—will arguably be more effective paraeducators.

### **Statement of Problem**

The federal government has identified entry-level requirements for paraeducators in the No Child Left Behind Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. In addition to these laws, certain qualifications, responsibilities, and limitations are further

described by individual states and local education agencies. It is important that paraeducators who work with students with disabilities understand their role and legal responsibilities. This will allow them to work more effectively with students served in special education and comply with laws and local guidelines. Without a clear understanding of paraeducators' knowledge regarding their roles and responsibilities, it is difficult to target training needs and provide adequate support in areas of greatest need so paraeducators can fulfill their responsibilities. There is a need for research targeting paraeducators' perceptions of their knowledge in relation to their various roles and responsibilities based on standards that have been outlined by the state education agencies. Currently in Utah, the training needed by paraeducators is unknown. Training may be haphazard and ineffective, or it may be irrelevant to individual employment needs. When there is no targeted training, instruction alongside the licensed teacher is sub-par, and therefore, the students may not be as successful as they might have been if they had paraeducators who are systematically trained according to state standards.

### **Statement of Purpose**

In order to perform jobs within legal limitations and to meet employment expectations, there is a critical need for paraeducators to be trained. Paraeducators in Utah must know their roles and responsibilities according to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals (USOE, 2003). This study included a survey to address the self-perceived knowledge Utah paraeducators had regarding their jobs. In addition, the researcher examined the types of responsibilities paraeducators had in different work settings and their self-identified need for training. This study examined the perceptions of paraeducators in the 51st largest school district in the United States regarding the types of responsibilities they have in different work settings and the standards established by the Utah State Office of Education.

## **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their responsibilities?
2. What are paraeducators' perceptions of their knowledge regarding their responsibilities based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals?
3. What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their need for training?

## **Method**

The purpose of this study was to survey paraeducators in a Utah school district to determine their perception of their knowledge of paraeducator roles and responsibilities based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals. The four sections from the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals are included: support instructional opportunities; demonstrate professionalism and ethical practices; support a positive environment; and communicate effectively and participate in the team process. By gathering information regarding the paraeducators' self-perceived knowledge of their responsibilities, the researcher identified current training needs of paraeducators in Utah. These data are helpful to state and local educators in addition to the institutes of higher education by providing descriptive data to drive professional development for paraeducators and their supervisors. In this section, the methodology will be discussed including the research design, participants, setting, instrument, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

## **Research Design**

The researcher created a survey instrument based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals (USOE, 2003) to answer the research questions outlined in the introduction. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the university to conduct this

research, and the researcher received IRB approval from the participating district. The appropriate leadership personnel, including the paraeducator coordinator, were contacted for research approval and support. A summary of the research and a copy of the survey instrument was provided with the request to survey all of the district's special education paraeducators. Once IRB approval was received from the district, the researcher sent the survey to the district coordinator who disseminated the survey via district-provided email and the paraeducators were asked to complete the survey by an indicated deadline.

**Participants.** Special education paraeducators working in a large, suburban school district in the intermountain west were chosen for this study. It is considered a convenience sample for the purposes of this research. Participant selection was based on the paraeducators' instructional role in the education of students with disabilities. A total of 250 classified special education paraeducators were employed for the 2014–2015 school year, according to information obtained from the district administration office. The participants indicated gender, age, years of experience, classroom setting, school setting, types of disabilities, and amount of formal training (e.g., college degree, professional training) on the survey. The survey also provided a description of their typical work setting (e.g., self-contained classroom, general education classroom) in addition to areas of needed training. The number of participating paraeducators was 95, or 38 percent.

**Demographics of district.** The district comprises of 8 high schools, 16 junior high schools, 62 elementary schools, and 7 specialty schools (Wikipedia, 2014). In the 2010–2011 school year, it was the 51st largest school district in the United States with a total enrollment of 70,083 (Wikipedia, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2010) identifies the district as being suburban.



According to 2010–2011 data, there were 70,083 students in the district with 57% White, 31% Hispanic, 4% Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander, 4% Asian, 3% African American 1% American Indian/Alaska Native. Nineteen percent of the population is English language learners and 11% of the students have a disability (The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, 2013).

**Recruitment.** The researcher contacted the paraeducator coordinator for the district to discuss the benefits of the research for the district. After receiving approval, the researcher emailed the district coordinator with a link to the Qualtrics survey, which was emailed to all paraeducators in the district. The paraeducators are all provided with an email from the school district. An email reminder was sent one week following the initial email invitation. There was no further recruitment of paraeducators.

### **Settings**

The paraeducators were employed in a variety of settings including self-contained classrooms, resource classrooms, and general education classrooms. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the paraeducators in this study reported spending their school day in the special education resource room or self-contained classroom. The survey was available via an online survey service and the participants completed the survey on a school or home computer.

### **Instruments**

Because a review of the literature did not yield a specific instrument to address the information sought for this study, a survey was designed by the researcher (see Appendix C) in order to answer the research questions. In order to establish validity for the survey, the instrument was reviewed by eight paraeducators. The paraeducators answered the survey questions and five days later were asked to complete the survey a second time. No changes were made following the review of the survey by the eight paraeducators. There were two changes

made to the survey after consulting with the district paraeducator coordinator including the addition of adding physical restraints under the area of physical supports and the addition of the final question, “What types of training would you like to receive?”

The survey was designed to measure self-perceived knowledge of paraeducators’ duties based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals, to identify their daily responsibilities, and to specify areas of self-perceived training needs. The survey was divided into three sections: demographic information, roles, and standards. Section 1 asked the participants to answer 11 questions regarding demographic information such as age, gender, years of work experience, and work setting. Section 2 asked paraeducators to identify typical responsibilities in their day out of 20 possible responsibilities. The responsibilities included instructional supports such as reading individually with students, clerical support such as grading papers, and physical supports such as changing diapers. Section 3 requested the participants to indicate their level of knowledge of the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals according to a four-point Likert scale (1 = none; 2 = somewhat; 3 = very; 4 = extremely) and to indicate areas of desired training. Section 3 was divided into four parts based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals (Standard 1: Support instructional opportunities; Standard 2: Demonstrate professionalism and ethical practices; Standard 3: Support a positive learning environment; Standard 4: Communicate effectively and participate in the team process) (USOE, 2003). The survey had total of 69 questions. The questions in the survey reflected the federal regulations for paraeducators according to IDEA (2004) and Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals (USOE, 2003). The survey took an average of 15 minutes to complete.

**Section 1: Demographics.** Participants were asked to provide basic information regarding their age, gender, language, education, ethnicity, years of instructional experience, work setting, and hours worked per week. The researcher was particularly interested in the setting in which the paraeducator works (e.g., general education classroom, resource classroom, self-contained classroom, special school, residential school) and their years of experience.

**Section 2: Responsibilities.** Participants indicated the type of instructional support they provide students with disabilities. It is evident throughout the literature that paraeducators provide support within a vast range of responsibilities. For example, some paraeducators work with small groups in pullout settings while others assist in general education classrooms. Some paraeducators assist with testing accommodations, and others provide medical assistance, grade papers, or accompany students to lunch. It is important to know the types of support that paraeducators provide in order to improve the effectiveness of professional development.

**Section 3: Standards.** This section contains 37 questions derived from the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals. Participants rated their self-perceived knowledge of or competency in a variety of areas using a 4-point Likert scale. On the scale, a score of 1 signifies little or no knowledge/competency, a score of 2 means some knowledge/competency, a score of 3 means very high knowledge/competency, and a score of 4 means extremely knowledgeable/competent.

***Standard 1: Support Instructional Opportunities.*** Standard 1 of the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals focuses on supporting instructional opportunities. Twelve questions drawn from this section involved knowledge in reading, writing, and math in addition to teaching strategies. Paraprofessionals are expected to deliver effective instruction, based on direction from the special educator; record information; and organize learning materials.

***Standard 2: Demonstrate Professionalism and Ethical Practices.*** Nine questions from Standard 2 investigate paraeducators' professional and ethical practices. According to this standard, paraeducators are responsible for adhering to special education law, regulations, policies, and procedures.

***Standard 3: Support a Positive Learning Environment.*** Paraeducators create and support positive learning environments. Eight questions supporting Standard 3 included using proactive management strategies when teaching students and following behavior management or intervention plans.

***Standard 4: Communicate Effectively and Participate in the Team Process.*** The final standard, Standard 4, is effective communication and participation on a team. Eight questions involved effective communication along with being part of an instructional team.

Additionally, paraeducators were given the opportunity to select areas of desired training including academic, autism, behavior, collaboration, inclusion, and medical. They were also provided the opportunity to write in any training that they desired.

## **Procedures**

Data were collected through an online survey program from paraeducators in the participating district. The researcher completed all required documentation from the district to gain IRB approval to conduct research in their district. Following district consent, the researcher emailed the district paraeducator coordinator with a link to the survey along with a letter asking all the paraeducators in the district to complete the survey. An email reminder was sent one week after the initial email was delivered. The participants were provided with two ways to contact the researcher if they had concerns or questions. Through the use of the online survey program, all

information has remained confidential. Final data from the surveys were collected two weeks after the survey was distributed.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data collected from the surveys. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) and percentages were used to describe the results of the survey. They provided information on paraeducators' responsibilities and their perceived knowledge of their preparation to work with students with disabilities according to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals. The ANOVA comparisons included work setting (e.g. General Education, Special Education Resource, Special Education Self-Contained) and years of experience with the demographics, regular responsibilities, and desired training. The analysis follows the research question: What are paraeducators' self-perceived knowledge regarding their responsibility based on the standards? In addition, the analysis addressed the responsibilities of paraeducators in the study, which follows the research question: What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their responsibilities? Finally, the analysis addressed the need for future training, which answers the final research question, What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their need for training?

### **Instrument Validity**

The validity of the survey instrument was tested initially by the district paraeducator coordinator, who read through the survey and agreed with the survey questions. The instrument was later administered to eight paraeducators who were not participating in the final survey and administered again to the same paraeducators within five days. The results indicated that no adjustments needed to be made to the survey.

## Results

The following questions were used to guide the study.

1. What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their regular responsibilities?
2. What are paraeducators' perceptions of their knowledge regarding their responsibilities based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals?
3. What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their need for training?

The researcher created a survey instrument based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals to gather data on the research questions. Ninety-five of the 250 paraeducators in the participating district responded to the survey. Each participant involved in the study completed the survey.

The survey included a section for personal demographic information. Table 1 gives the details of the demographics of the 95 participating paraeducators.

The demographics of the paraeducators showed that the majority of the participants were Caucasian females (87% Caucasian, 96% female). Additionally, the slight majority, 54%, were 46 years or older. Twenty-four (25%) paraeducators had a high school diploma and thirty-four (36%) had an associate degree or higher.

The vast majority of respondents were from elementary schools (85%). There were 14 (15%) respondents from secondary schools. The majority (91%) of the paraeducator participants worked in a special education resource room or special education self-contained classrooms. An analysis using SPSS indicated a normal distribution of work setting and allows the researcher to conduct an analysis of variance with appropriate assumptions.

Table 1

*Paraeducator Demographics*

Category		Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Gender	Male	4	4%
	Female	91	96%
Ethnicity	African-American/Black	0	0%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2%
	Caucasian/White	83	87%
	Did not specify	5	5%
	Hispanic or Latino	5	5%
	Native Hawaiian	0	0%
	Age Range	18–25	7
	26–35	13	14%
	36–45	24	25%
	46+	51	54%
Level of Education	High school diploma	24	25%
	Vocational/Technical school (2 Years)	4	4%
	Some college	33	35%
	Associate degree	19	2%
	Bachelor degree	13	14%
	Master degree or more	2	2%
Years of Experience	0–2	20	21%
	3–5	22	23%
	6–10	31	33%
	11–15	12	13%
	16 +	10	11%
Work Setting	General Education	6	6%
	Special Education Resource	46	48%
	Special Education Self-Contained	40	42%
	Special Education Special School	3	3%
	Other	0	0%
School Setting	Post-Secondary	0	0%
	High School	5	5%
	Jr High/Middle School	9	9%
	Elementary	81	85%
	Preschool	0	0%
Supervisor	General Education Teacher	2	2%
	Special Education Teacher	86	91%
	Department Head	5	5%
	Physical/Occupational Therapist	0	0%
	Don't know	2	2%
Hours Worked per Week	0–10	1	1%
	11–20	14	15%
	21–30	72	76%
	31 +	8	8%

Thirty-three percent of the paraeducators in this survey had 6–10 years of experience. Twenty-four percent of the participants had 11 or more years of experience while 23% of the participants had 3–5 years experience and 21% of the participants had 0–2 years of experience. An analysis of variance is appropriate with this subgroup as well due to the normal distribution of years of experience.

The typical participant in this study is a Caucasian female older than 46 with some college experience who has worked between 6 and 10 years in an elementary special education resource class who currently works between 21 and 30 hours per week.

### **Research Question 1**

*What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their regular responsibilities?*

The overwhelming majority of the paraeducators participate in some type of instructional support on a daily basis. Of the participants surveyed, Table 2 shows that 65% indicated that they read individually with students on a daily basis, 77% review earlier instruction, 55% help with homework or assignments, 87% support small groups with independent practice, 55% provide one-on-one tutoring, and 40% provide academic support in the general education classroom.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed to compare the work responsibilities of paraeducators dependent on their work setting. This analysis revealed that there are significant differences between the responsibilities of paraeducators in a resource classroom and a self-contained classroom. Specifically, paraeducators employed in a self-contained classroom have more responsibilities involving physical supports such as changing diapers and assisting with medical procedures. All paraeducators in this study spend the majority of their time working on independent practice with a small group at least monthly (98%  $p > .05$ ) and reading individually with a student (92%  $p > .05$ ). They spend the least amount of time



attending meetings with 58% reporting that they never attend meetings, using physical restraints (82% never), and attending trainings (39% never). However, there is a statistical difference between paraeducators who work in a self-contained classroom as compared to a resource classroom. The p-value is less than .05 in the areas of reviewing earlier instruction, supporting independent practice with small groups, providing academic support in the general education classroom, updating progress reports, organizing instructional materials, changing diapers, assisting at breakfast and lunch, and using physical restraints.

A one-way ANOVA compared the responsibilities of paraeducators based on years of experience. It was interesting to note that no significant differences were found in any areas of responsibility based on years of experience indicating that all paraeducators are responsible for providing support in a variety of areas regardless of their prior experience.

Table 2

*Instructional Support*

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not at All
Read individually with student	65%	20%	6%	8%
Review earlier instruction	77%	16%	2%	5%
Help with homework/assignments	55%	8%	8%	28%
Independent practice with small group	87%	7%	3%	2%
Read tests to students	14%	29%	23%	34%
One-on-one tutoring	55%	13%	8%	24%
Academic support in general education classroom	40%	36%	7%	17%
Provide speech therapy	6%	5%	2%	86%

The results of the survey indicate that paraeducators spend little time providing clerical support (see Table 3). Of the 95 paraeducators in the survey 73% make copies, laminate, and so on, either daily or weekly and 72% organize instructional materials daily or weekly. However,

47% indicated that they never run errands, 58% never grade papers, 58% never attend meetings, and 39% never attend trainings.

Table 3

*Clerical Support*

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not at All
Update progress reports	16%	16%	65%	3%
Translate (e.g., Spanish, sign language)	7%	0%	92%	1%
Make copies, laminate, etc.	19%	54%	17%	11%
Run errands	19%	23%	11%	47%
Grade papers	19%	20%	3%	58%
Attend meetings	1%	13%	28%	58%
Attend trainings	3%	1%	57%	39%
Organize instructional materials	51%	21%	9%	19%

Paraeducators in this study do not provide much physical support for students. On a daily basis only 11% support medical procedures, 31% change diapers, and 3% use physical restraints. They do assist at breakfast or lunch with 40% indicating that they do so on a daily basis. These results are outlined in Table 4. The one-way ANOVA indicated a statistical difference in these areas, which signifies that paraeducators who work in self-contained settings are more likely to perform these physical supports as compared to paraeducators who work in resource classrooms.

Table 4

*Physical Support*

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not at All
Medical procedures	11%	1%	1%	87%
Change diapers	31%	2%	3%	64%
Assist at breakfast and lunch	40%	4%	1%	55%
Physical restraints	3%	8%	6%	82%

## Research Question 2

*What are paraeducators' perceptions of their knowledge regarding their responsibilities based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals?*

This portion of the survey measured paraeducators self-perceived abilities based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraeducators (USOE, 2003). Standard 1 revealed that the majority of paraeducators felt extremely or very competent in their abilities to support instruction. Of the participants in this study, 67% felt competent in their knowledge of basic reading/reading readiness, 56% felt competent in their knowledge of math/math readiness, and 54% in writing/writing readiness. Paraeducators do not feel as confident with their knowledge of teaching strategies with only 49% indicating that they are extremely or very knowledgeable. Eighty-seven percent feel confident in delivering instruction based on the supervisor's lesson plan (see Table 5).

A one-way ANOVA compared the self-perceived knowledge of paraeducators based on years of experience and work setting for Standard 1. There were no significant differences in any area in Standard 1 based setting except in response to the question, "How well do I help students in other settings (e.g., computer lab, playground, library)?" when based on work setting or years of experience. For the question, the p value was less than .05 indicating that work experience and setting did make a difference in how well they support children with disabilities in other settings.

Based on the results from Standard 2, seen in Table 6, paraeducators feel extremely confident in their professional and ethical practices. Seventy-eight percent indicated that they respect confidentiality extremely well; 60% maintain a positive attitude; 71% maintain reliable attendance, punctuality, and dependability; 65% are sensitive to cultural and individual difference; and 68% adhere to the civil rights of youth and their families.

Table 5

*Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 1: Support Instructional Opportunities*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How much do I know about basic reading/reading readiness?	16%	51%	33%	1%
How much do I know about basic math/math readiness?	11%	44%	44%	1%
How much do I know about basic writing/writing readiness?	12%	42%	45%	1%
How much do I know about teaching strategies and techniques?	11%	38%	49%	2%
How well do I assist in delivering instruction according to my supervisor's lesson plan?	40%	47%	12%	1%
How well do I record relevant data about learners?	31%	47%	22%	3%
How well do I organize material to support learning?	33%	47%	19%	1%
How well do I use assessment instruments to document and maintain data?	25%	37%	28%	9%
How well do I help students in other settings (e.g., computer lab, playground, library)?	34%	47%	13%	6%
How well do I use basic educational technology?	21%	52%	27%	0%
How well do I use interventions to adapt to learning needs?	27%	48%	23%	1%
How well do I provide documentation for observations and functional assessments of behavior?	25%	38%	29%	7%

A one-way ANOVA compared the self-perceived knowledge of paraeducators based on years of experience and work setting for Standard 2. No significant difference was found for any question in this standard.

Table 6

*Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 2: Demonstrate Professionalism and Ethical Practices*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How much do I know about of the distinctions in the roles and responsibilities of teachers/providers, paraprofessionals, administrators, families, and other team members?	24%	46%	28%	1%
How well do I carry out responsibilities in a manner consistent with all pertinent laws, regulations, policies and procedures?	46%	45%	8%	0%
How well do I respect confidentiality?	78%	21%	1%	0%
How well do I maintain a positive attitude and contribute to a positive work environment?	60%	36%	4%	0%
How well do I maintain reliable attendance, punctuality, and dependability?	71%	28%	1%	0%
How well do I exhibit sensitivity to cultural, individual differences and disabilities?	65%	34%	1%	0%
How well do I adhere to the civil, and human rights of children, youth and their families?	68%	29%	2%	0%
How much do I know about health, safety and emergency procedures?	38%	45%	16%	1%
How well do I pursue and participate in staff development and learning opportunities?	31%	35%	31%	4%

The results of Standard 3 show that paraeducators are very confident, but not extremely confident, in their abilities to create and support positive learning environments. A one-way ANOVA compared the self-perceived knowledge of paraeducators based on years of experience and work experience for Standard 3. There was a significant difference between paraeducators working in a resource classroom and a self-contained classroom in their level of confidence based on the following questions: “How well do I monitor learners and make appropriate decisions while coaching or tutoring in different settings?” and “How well do I provide medical care an/or teaching self-care needs?” (See Table 7) Similarly the same difference was found when looking at work experience.

Table 7

*Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 3: Support a Positive Learning Environment*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How well do I use proactive management strategies to engage learners?	28%	46%	22%	3%
How well do I support my supervisor's behavior management plan?	53%	42%	5%	0%
How well do I demonstrate knowledge of learner characteristics and factors that influence behavior?	28%	48%	22%	1%
How well do I assist in maintaining an environment conducive to the learning process?	42%	48%	9%	0%
How well do I teach children and youth social skills?	31%	54%	16%	0%
How well do I assist learners in using self-control and self-management strategies?	32%	46%	22%	0%
How well do I monitor learners and make appropriate decisions while coaching or tutoring in different settings?	27%	52%	16%	5%
How well do I provide medical care and/or teaching self-care needs?	19%	28%	31%	16%

Standard 4 focuses on effective communication and participation on a team. As shown in Table 8, paraeducators in this study were less confident overall in their abilities in this area but the results showed that a significant portion of the participants still felt very confident in their abilities. In Standard 4 there was not much variation in the confidence level; however, they were the least confident in their ability to participate in instructional team meetings, participate in conferences with families or primary caregivers, and foster beneficial relationships between agency/school, families, children/youth, and community.

A one-way ANOVA compared the self-perceived knowledge of paraeducators based on years of experience and work setting for Standard 4. There were no statistical differences in any of the questions for either of the subgroups on this standard.

Table 8

*Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 4: Communicate Effectively & Participate in the Team Process*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How well do I serve as a member of an instructional team?	40%	47%	9%	3%
How well do I use effective communication skills?	36%	56%	8%	0%
How well do I provide relevant feedback and make recommendations regarding learner performance and programming to a supervisor?	41%	42%	16%	1%
How well do I participate in instructional team meetings?	26%	29%	18%	26%
How well do I use appropriate channels for resolving concerns or conflicts?	33%	49%	18%	0%
How well do I participate in conferences with families or primary caregivers when requested?	23%	32%	11%	35%
How well do I foster beneficial relationships between agency/school, families, children/youth, and community?	27%	31%	22%	20%
How well do I collaborate with staff, teachers, and the principal?	35%	39%	16%	11%

### Research Question 3

*What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their need for training?*

Paraeducator in the participating district indicated that they would like to receive more training in all areas. The participants were allowed to select as many areas of training as desired. Shown in Table 9, the majority of the participants (68%) indicated a strong desire to receive training on autism and behavior. Other training that was requested included basic writing, technology, sign language, communication, record keeping, and special education.

Table 9

*Desire for Training in Various Disciplines*

	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Academic	45	47%
Autism	65	68%
Behavior	65	68%
Collaboration	28	29%
Inclusion	30	32%
Medical	22	23%
Other	12	13%

**Summary of Results**

*What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their regular responsibilities?*

The majority of paraeducators in the participating district are performing instructional tasks, which supports the research that says that paraeducators have moved from performing clerical tasks to working directly with children with disabilities (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). However, there are still many paraeducators who are performing clerical tasks and other tasks on a regular basis and according to NCLB (2001) this is appropriate as long as the majority of their time is spent working directly with children.

*What are paraeducators' perceptions of their knowledge regarding their responsibilities based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals?*

Overall, paraeducators in the participating district feel fairly competent with their instructional abilities. They lack confidence in their ability to deal with behavioral issues, determine appropriate teaching strategies, and record academic and behavioral data. This is not surprising when we consider the research that says many paraeducators received little to no training upon being hired (Downing et al., 2000; Chopra et al., 2004). This same research indicated that paraeducators want training in behavioral interventions, specific disabilities and their effects on learning, and roles and responsibilities.



*What are the perceptions of paraeducators regarding their need for training?*

This study highlighted a need for paraeducators to receive training in autism and behavior. They indicated in section 2 of the survey that they feel less competent in these areas and they overwhelmingly stated in the final question that they would like to receive more training in both areas. There were very specific needs in which paraeducators wanted to receive training including basic writing, record keeping, technology, sign language, specific district policy, communication, and disabilities.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to acquire information about paraeducators' perceived knowledge of their responsibilities according to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals. The data collected from this survey will be used to inform better practice in preparing paraeducators to work with students with disabilities. This study examined paraeducators perceptions on their responsibilities and concluded that the majority of paraeducators are spending most of their time providing instructional support. Very rarely do they provide clerical or physical supports. The results of this study support the No Child Left Behind law of 2001 which specifies that paraeducators should spend most of their time working directly with students and only some time on clerical tasks. These results may be indicative of their area of work. While 42% of the participants noted that they work in a self-contained classroom, it was not clear if they work with students who have severe disabilities or mild/moderate disabilities

Paraeducators are spending most of their time supporting instruction, which aligns with the responsibilities of a paraeducator as outlined in IDEA 2004, NCLB 2001, and in the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraeducators. Paraeducators reported spending the majority of their

time working with students on instructional activities. Previous research has increased the understanding that paraeducators are increasingly involved throughout the instructional process (Pickett, 1997; Causton-Theoharis, 2009) and suggests that even more targeted and appropriate training is needed.

According to the ANOVA, there was not difference in the responsibilities of paraeducators based on their years of experience. These data indicate that there is a need for constant and ongoing training as inexperienced paraeducators are working in the same capacities as more experienced paraeducators. No Child Left Behind (2001) outlines a minimum requirement for paraeducators simply stating that they must be knowledgeable, capable of providing instruction, and earned a high school diploma or equivalent. Other than some specific requirement for Title I schools, there has not been a systematic way to identify how knowledgeable and capable paraeducators are in providing instruction. The Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals in addition to this survey allow for a measure of capacity.

Paraeducators did not feel very confident in their behavior management abilities. The majority (68%) of the paraeducators indicated that they wanted behavioral training. More specifically, they are looking for strategies to handle behavior as they instruct small groups of students. Behavior interventions are widely variable, and one could speculate that if paraeducators are provided with a specific behavior intervention plan, they would be more confident in the specific application of behavior management strategies. Based on the responses to the questions, it appears that paraeducators want to know what to do in situations that are not covered by a classroom management plan or a behavioral intervention plan. This is not a surprising indicator from this study considering paraeducators in multiple studies have indicated

that they wanted training in behavior management (Downing et al., 2000; French, 1998; Morgan & Ashbaker, 1997).

A similar conclusion was drawn in the area of teaching strategies. Best practices would suggest that when paraeducators are provided with lesson plans from their supervisor, they feel extremely confident in their abilities to follow through with the outlined lesson, but they lack the confidence to come up with their own teaching strategies. This is a reasonable expectation for paraeducators but one that needs to be noted and addressed by their supervisors. Additionally, they are unsure of how to monitor learners and make appropriate decisions while teaching. It is imperative to provide training to paraeducators on effective, research-based instructional strategies. While this autonomy is empowering, paraeducators in this survey indicated that they feel confident with their knowledge of teaching strategies but stated that they would like more training in this area. Paraeducators in previous studies perceived that they need more training in instructional and behavioral strategies, which align with research on this topic (Nelson, 2005).

Paraeducators indicated that they are recording student data on a monthly basis. Additionally, they indicated that they are not knowledgeable about collecting behavioral or academic data, yet they report that they are working directly with students on a daily basis. This is surprising since one would expect data to be collected more frequently. Perhaps data are being collected by teachers, but according to Ashbaker and Morgan (2006) and Causton-Theoharis (2009), this is a responsibility that is well suited for paraeducators. Instructional and behavioral data would be beneficial in helping the teacher and the paraeducator make program and instructional decisions. However, again this was one area that paraeducators did not feel as confident.

There is a lot of domain-specific vocabulary in special education, and this survey showed that some of this language may not be clear among paraeducators. For example, many of the paraeducators probably provide informal speech therapy support when they are reading with the students or working on other language activities; however, they do not appear to be aware of the specific speech/language goals that they are supporting or that these activities might be considered speech therapy support. In the survey paraeducators reported that only 14% provide speech therapy while 65% read individually with students at least daily. If the child is receiving speech therapy, reading with them would be considered supporting speech therapy.

Additionally, in the Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals, the terms *instructional team meeting* and *instructional team* are used in Standard 4, “How well do I participate in instructional team meetings?” and “How well do I serve as a member of an instructional team?” There was an even spread among the respondents on this question 26% feel extremely confident, 29% feel very confident, 18% feel somewhat confident and 26% do not participate in meetings. Without clarification, this term could be interpreted as being the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting while others could interpret it as a team meeting with the teachers in order to collaborate on instruction, or any other possible meeting. This may suggest the need to educate paraeducators on the jargon in special education and to use domain-specific vocabulary with them. However, if paraeducators are exposed to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals, the term “instructional team” is clarified and “refers to those individuals who have day-to-day responsibility for providing education and other direct services to children/youth and their families. Instructional teams are found in general and special education settings, Title 1, multilingual/ESL, early childhood, and school-to-work preparation programs” (USOE, 2003).

In response to questions in Standard 4, “How well do I participate in conferences with families or primary care givers when requested” and “How well do I foster beneficial relationships between agency/school, families, children/youth, and community?” Paraeducators reported that they are not collaborating with parents, participating in team meetings, or attending conferences and training. This may indicate a lack of invitations for paraeducators to participate in this way. Paraeducators are also limited in their ability to collaborate due to the restraints on their time.

Paraeducators indicated that they are not very knowledgeable about health, safety, and emergency procedures or at providing medical care or teaching self-care needs; however, they did not indicate a desire to receive training in this area. This could relate back to their perception of their responsibilities where they indicated that they do not participate in physical or medical supports very often. There were some paraeducators that asked for very specific training on medical procedures and other health related needs. It can be understood that there are a few paraeducators in this study who work with students with medical or health concerns and want to know more about how to support them. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the special education teacher to provide the specific and necessary training for each paraeducator, and continuous feedback and assessment of need is important to provide on the job training (Downing et al., 2000; Friend & Cook, 2010).

### **Limitations**

A significant limitation of this study is the small sample size. This study is considered a convenience sample was provided to 250 paraeducators in the district and 95, or 38%, responded. In addition, the district surveyed may not be an accurate representation of paraeducators’ perceptions as compared to a smaller, more rural school district.

The instrument utilized was developed for the purpose of this study and was tied directly to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals. Although the district paraeducator coordinator and a representative group of paraeducators reviewed the survey, it has not been empirically tested and approved as being a valid and reliable instrument. It is possible that an empirically supported survey may have yielded more valid results. In addition, the researcher is making the assumption that the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals represents that which is important for paraeducators.

Other limitations of this study revolve around the participants. The survey options from the Likert scale (1 = none; 2 = somewhat; 3 = very; 4 = extremely) were not explicitly defined and were open for interpretation dependent on the participant. The majority (85%) of the participants were working in an elementary school and the data could be skewed based on the work setting. In this study, the participants' perceptions of their abilities may reflect some biases or limits because of the innate tendency toward desirability.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Despite the limitations, this study provides a foundation for future research among paraeducators in Utah. This research gave many indicators of the abilities of paraeducators but needs to be expanded beyond the participating district. The following suggested areas would further the research on paraeducators self-perceived knowledge of their abilities based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals.

1. Expand this research to other districts in Utah and other states.
2. Conduct research to validate the survey instrument and to check for reliability.
3. Conduct research regarding the self-perceived abilities and role of secondary paraeducators.

4. Conduct research on whether the years of experience have an effect on reports of competency.
5. Conduct research on how these data compare to their supervising teachers' opinion of their abilities.

Paraeducators have been providing support to students in special education, and this study adds to the professional research and indicates further work is warranted in this area. School districts in Utah would greatly benefit from the survey instrument developed in this study to understand the needs of paraeducators in their district.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

This study was conducted with the intent to understand the training support practitioners receive and to appropriately target training for paraeducators who work with students with disabilities. The results of the survey provide a wealth of information for practitioners to springboard relevant training for paraeducators in Utah. This information is valuable for the teachers in the participating district but can be expanded to include teachers throughout the state of Utah. It is anticipated that school districts in Utah could use the survey instrument to better understand the needs of paraeducators in their district, especially as it relates to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals.

It is recommended that that this data is shared with the participating district in order to inform their training for paraeducators. The district paraeducator coordinator could share results of the study with paraeducators in the participating district and comparable districts in the state of Utah. With that knowledge, paraeducators could then be trained in areas of desired training and given support in areas where they were less confident according to their indications on the survey. This will allow for the paraeducators to be invested in the training that is provided to

them. Additionally, it would be beneficial for the paraeducators to be empowered and have the opportunity to teach in areas of their self-perceived strength.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the significant findings of this research suggest that paraeducators desire training in areas of their assigned duties. Overall, they feel confident in their abilities but are open to learning more. This study suggests that there is not enough training for paraeducators who generally work with the most at-risk population in the school. As paraeducators are increasingly involved in the education of students with disabilities, they must have adequate and ongoing training targeted to their area of need.



## REFERENCES

- Ashbaker, B. Y., & Morgan, J. (2006). *Paraprofessionals in the classroom*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Ashbaker, B. Y., Young, J. R., & Morgan, J. (2001). *Paraeducators: Their roles in the instructional process*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Dallas, TX.
- Causton-Theoharis, Julie (2009). *The paraprofessional's handbook for effective support in inclusive classrooms*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.
- Chopra, R. V., Sandoval-Lucero, E., Aragon, L., Bernal, C., Berg de Balderas, H., & Carroll, D. (2004). The paraprofessional role of connector. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*(4), 219–231. doi: 10.1177/07419325040250040501
- Council for Exceptional Children (2012). Section 6: Paraeducators serving individuals with exceptional learning needs. In *Role of paraeducator*. Retrieved from [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)
- Daniels, V. I., & McBride, A. (2001). Paraeducators as critical team members: Redefining roles and responsibilities. *NASSP Bulletin, 85*, 66–74. doi: 10.1177/019263650108562308
- Downing, J. E., Ryndak, D., & Clark D. (2000). Paraeducators in inclusive classrooms: Their own perspectives. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*(2), 157–164. doi: 10.1177/074193250002100308
- Fisher, M., & Pleasants, S. (2012). Roles, responsibilities, and concerns of paraeducators: Findings from a statewide survey. *Remedial and Special Education, 33*(5), 287-297. doi: 10.1177/0741932510397762
- French, N. (1998). Working together: Resource teachers and paraeducators. *Remedial and Special Education, 19*(6), 357–368. doi: 10.1177/074193259801900606

- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2010). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Gaylord, V., Wallace, T., Pickett, A. L., and Likins, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Impact: Feature Issue on Paraeducators Supporting Students with Disabilities and At-Risk, 15(2)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration. Retrieved from <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/152>
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, Amendments to \ IDEA Section 612.14B iii (2004).
- Morgan, J., & Ashbaker, B. Y. (1997). *Proceedings of the Annual Utah Paraeducator Conference*, Ogden, Utah. Center for Persons with Disabilities, Utah State University, Logan, UT. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED416187.pdf>
- Moshoyannis, T., Pickett, A., & Granick, L. (1999). *The evolving roles and education training needs of teacher and paraprofessional teams in the New York City Public Schools*. New York, NY: City University of New York.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2000). *Education statistics: Elementary and secondary schools and staffing survey*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education, Office of Education Research. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/>
- Nelson, H. G. (2005). *Perceived Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on Paraprofessionals* (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University) Retrieved from: <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/595/>
- No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 *et. seq.* (2002).
- Pickett, A. L. & Gerlach, K. (1997). *Paraeducators in school settings: The future*. In A.L. Pickett & K. Gerlach (Eds), *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach* (pp.

263-267). Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

Pickett, A. L., Likins, M., & Wallace, T. (2003). *The employment and preparation of paraeducators, the state of the art – 2003*. New York City, NY: City University of New York. Retrieved from <http://www.nrcpara.org/resources/employment-and-preparation-paraeducators-state-art-2003>

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation (2013). *The 2013 broad prize for urban education Granite School District Utah*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. Retrieved from [http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/UT\\_GRANITE.pdf](http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/UT_GRANITE.pdf)

Utah State Office of Education (2003). *Utah standards for instructional paraprofessionals*. Retrieved from <http://utahparas.org/standards4paras.pdf>

Wikipedia, (2014, September 14) *Granite School District*. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granite\\_School\\_District](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granite_School_District)

Wikipedia, (2014 August 29), *List of the largest school districts in the United States by enrollment*. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_the\\_largest\\_school\\_districts\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_by\\_enrollment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_largest_school_districts_in_the_United_States_by_enrollment)

## **Appendix A: Review of Literature**

Paraeducators, noncredentialed school employees who provide services to students with disabilities under the direction of a licensed special education professional, are spending an increasing amount of time working with students with disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2012; Downing et al., 2000; Pickett et al., 2003). They are required to supplement instruction, deal with behavior concerns, collect data, supervise students, teach and work in collaboration with teachers, monitor or help with health issues, and attend to clerical work (CEC, 2012; Gaylord et al., 2002). Although many of the traditional responsibilities, including clerical tasks and nonacademic support, are still part of paraeducators' job description, the expectations have increased; they are expected to be involved throughout the instructional process (Pickett, 1997). Because of these responsibilities and expectations, it is imperative that paraeducators know and understand their ethical and legal responsibilities according to federal and state law. The review of literature will define the term paraeducator for the purposes of this paper, discuss the qualifications and responsibilities of paraeducators, and discuss the current standards for paraeducators in Utah.

### **Definition of Paraeducators**

Clarification of the definition of a paraeducator is necessary because the term has been used to describe so many different types of jobs within the school system. Prior to the passing of the federal special education law which pushed for states to outline standards for paraeducators, many paraeducators were used as clerical secretaries or classroom helpers performing tasks such as making copies and preparing materials (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

came into effect, it is necessary for paraeducators to work directly with students academically, physically, socially, and behaviorally (Causton-Theoharis, 2009).

Paraeducators have numerous titles: paraprofessional, teacher aide, teacher assistant, education technician, transition trainer, job coach, therapy assistant, home visitor, instructional assistant, classroom assistant, school assistant, and aide (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Causton-Theoharis, 2009; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Friend & Cook, 2010; Utah State Office of Education, 2009). The foundation for the definition of paraeducators is found in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA). NCLB and IDEA describe paraprofessionals as school employees, who work in special education or other educational areas such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and who are supervised by a licensed professional. These laws indicate the professional—and not the paraprofessional—is ultimately responsible for student outcomes. In addition to these descriptions, IDEA requires specific training of paraprofessionals. Other educational journals and articles consistently use similar verbiage to define paraeducators (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Causton-Theoharis, 2009; Friend & Cook, 2010; Gaylord et al., 2002; IDEA, 2004; Katsiyannis, Hodge, & Lanford, 2000; NCLB, 2001; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Supervision of paraeducators by a licensed professional, the special education teacher, stands out as a key component when defining a paraprofessional. All definitions agree a paraprofessional is a person employed by the school who is supervised by a licensed professional, responsible for student outcomes (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Causton-Theoharis, 2009; Friend & Cook, 2010; Gaylord, Wallace, Pickett & Likins, 2002; IDEA, 2004; Katsiyannis et al., 2000; NCLB, 2001; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). In Utah, a paraeducator is defined as a school employee who “delivers instruction under the direct supervision of a teacher” (USOE, 2012, p. 1), and they assist in schools when there are not enough qualified teachers in

areas of critical need, like special education. For the purpose of this paper, paraeducators will be defined as a noncredentialed school employee who provides services to students with disabilities under the direction of a licensed special education professional.

### **Paraeducator Qualifications**

The NCLB Act of 2001 requires paraeducators to be knowledgeable, be capable of providing instruction, and have earned a high school diploma or equivalent. Each state is responsible for the implementation and qualification of paraeducators (NCLB, 2001). NCLB identifies other qualifications for paraeducators. This act requires paraeducators working in Title I schools to have at least two years or more of higher education (beyond high school) and an associates degree or higher. They must meet a standard of quality through a formal assessment such as the ParaPro, which tests knowledge of and ability to instruct in reading, reading readiness, writing, writing readiness, math, and math readiness (NCLB, 2001).

According to IDEA, paraeducators are to be used in the education system with the intent that they are “appropriately trained and supervised,” and they are working to “assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities” (IDEA, 2004, Part B, Section 300 [b][2][iii]). The law states that paraeducators must be trained and outlines a requirement for policies to be in place for training. Requiring training leads to the need for paraeducator standards that describe the knowledge and skills for which the paraeducators should be trained. In order to adhere to standard requirements for paraeducators, special education teachers and other professionals in the school system must know what the standards entail.

Additionally, professionals in the field have outlined other important qualifications for paraeducators. Ashbaker and Morgan (2006) suggest that paraeducators should have knowledge in keeping records, using technology, and using effective instructional methods. The Council for

Exceptional Children (CEC) (2012) adds that paraeducators should enjoy working with and be dedicated in helping children, be willing to help the teacher in a variety of ways and be flexible, resourceful, and driven.

### **The Responsibilities of Paraeducators**

Although both NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) require the use of paraeducators in the classroom, the laws outline only general roles and responsibilities for paraeducators. NCLB allows for a paraeducator to be a one-on-one tutor; help with classroom management; provide assist in a computer laboratory, library, or media center; help involve parents; translate; and provide instruction to students. The law states that paraeducators are to spend most of their time working directly with students to help with their instruction but that some of the time may be spent on other tasks, such as clerical tasks (NCLB, 2001). The limitation of a paraeducator's responsibility is that they are not to provide the initial direct instruction to students unless a licensed teacher supervises them.

In addition to laws, there has been research dedicated to the field of education that has also helped to define the responsibilities of paraeducators in the school systems. Authors and researchers have provided lists of suggested duties for paraeducators; they do so while supporting the need for local education agencies (LEAs) to maintain flexibility to clarify paraeducators' responsibilities. Paraeducators are required to provide support academically, socially, physically, and behaviorally (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). Paraeducators have many instructional as well as noninstructional responsibilities as indicated by Table A1 according to professional research.

Table 10

*Paraeducator Responsibilities*

Instructional Responsibilities	Noninstructional Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read with the child</li> <li>• Review previous instruction</li> <li>• Assist with an assignment</li> <li>• Provide testing accommodations</li> <li>• Deliver appropriate curriculum to meet student needs</li> <li>• Collect progress monitoring data</li> <li>• Teach in small group settings</li> <li>• Provide instructional reinforcement</li> <li>• Review lessons or help students find information from reports</li> <li>• Work with small groups in instructional activities</li> <li>• Carryout behavior management plans</li> <li>• Provide objective information about the students to help with planning curriculum</li> <li>• Help to involve parents in the child's education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare materials</li> <li>• Grade papers/Check homework</li> <li>• Record grades</li> <li>• Feed a student</li> <li>• Move a student from place to place</li> <li>• Take care of medical procedures</li> <li>• Translate into native language</li> <li>• Change diapers/Toileting</li> <li>• Supervise Lunch/Recess/Bus</li> <li>• Complete clerical responsibilities (laminating, filing, making copies, etc)</li> <li>• Provide Physical Therapy</li> <li>• Act as a Job Coach</li> <li>• Carry out behavior intervention plans</li> <li>• Keep health/attendance records</li> <li>• Operate any technological equipment</li> </ul>

(Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Causton-Theoharis, 2009; Friend & Cook, 2010; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Pickett et al., 2003; Utah State Office of Education, 2009).

Research on paraeducators' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities performed in Indiana by Fisher and Pleasants (2012) uncovered paraeducators' perceptions on their roles and responsibilities. The results of this study revealed paraeducators primarily provided behavioral and social support and implemented teacher-planned instruction, and they believed supporting behavior was an appropriate responsibility for them. Paraeducators in Indiana often participated in developing lesson plans or interpreting for families. However, they did not feel that it was something that they should do as paraeducators. Other responsibilities belonging to paraeducators that were identified during this study support other research:

- Implementing teacher-planned instruction
- Supervising students



- Personal care support
- Attending planning meetings
- Adapting lessons designed by general education
- Providing information between general and special education
- Performing clerical duties
- Attending faculty meetings
- Providing information between school and parents

The data from the Fisher and Pleasants' (2012) study, in addition to the information found in the previously mentioned literature, indicate that there is a great need to clearly identify the role of paraeducators and to instruct them on their responsibilities with consideration of the work setting and the needs of the children with whom they are working.

The federal law gives power and responsibility to the states to ensure that specific roles and responsibilities are outlined. The responsibilities of paraeducators in Utah according to the Utah Paraeducator Handbook (USOE, 2009) includes the following: providing support to students with special needs; supervising on the playground or bus; serving as a job coach in the community for students with moderate to severe disabilities; conducting small-group sessions in reading, writing, and math; working in early childhood programs; and assisting non-English speaking students.

Other research supports the notion that paraeducators are involved in a wide variety of responsibilities throughout the day (Ashbaker et al., 2001; Chopra et al., 2004; Daniels & McBride, 2001; Downing et al., 2000; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; French, 1998; Friend & Cook, 2010; Gaylord et al., 2002; Moshoyannis et al., 1999; Pickett et al., 2003). However there is a smaller amount of research that measures paraeducators' perceptions of their qualifications for

those responsibilities based on state mandated standards. Clarification on how paraeducators perceive their roles and responsibilities can help school personnel “correct possible misconceptions, establish guidelines for performance, and provide the appropriate supervision and training” (Downing et al., 2000, p. 172).

### **Supervision**

Supervision of paraeducators by a licensed professional is a critical part of federal law. NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) indicate that a licensed professional must supervise the paraeducator, and therefore a paraeducator cannot provide instructional support except under supervision of a professional, generally the teacher. The lines of supervision are often blurred due to the lack of specific roles and responsibilities. Clarifying who the supervising teacher is, is necessary when paraeducators are assigned to more than one teacher or classroom (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Issues regarding planning, scheduling, delegating, training, and evaluating often arise when it is unclear who the direct supervisor is for the paraeducator.

French (1998) identified topics that would prepare teachers to supervise paraeducators. She mentioned topics such as knowledge of the legal limits of paraeducator authority, liability issues with IEP services, skills in task delegation, conflict management and negotiation, and creative problem solving. Teachers do not always feel prepared to supervise paraeducators and they are not well trained to do so. Typically, teachers learn how to supervise paraeducators on their own. In their supervision, it would be important for teachers to monitor the day-to-day responsibilities of the paraeducator and provide feedback on those responsibilities. Additionally, the supervising teacher is there to answer questions and recognize the positive things the paraeducator is doing. Downing et al. (2000) stated, “We must make sure that paraeducators feel

supported” (p. 179). By providing appropriate supervision, paraeducators will feel more support and have better direction to effectively fulfill their responsibilities.

### **Training**

Training is “a major void that [paraeducators] perceived” (p.180) according to a study by Downing et al. (2000). Numerous studies have addressed the need for better training for paraeducators (Ashbaker et al., 2001; Chopra et al., 2001; Downing et al., 2000; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; French, 1998; Friend & Cook, 2010; Gayloyr et al., 2002; Katsiyannis et al., 2000; Moshoyannis et al., 1999; Pickett et al., 2003; Walker, 2009; Werts, Harris, Tillery, & Roark, 2004). Amendments to IDEA now require states to ensure the training of paraeducators (Gaylord et al., 2002; IDEA, 2001). One of the key components that came from that legislation was a statewide training for paraeducators who work with children with disabilities (Wallace & Gerlach, 2001). A lot of paraeducator training is “on the job” (Katsiyannis et al., 2000, p. 298), generally very unstructured training that they figure out as they go along. It is important for paraeducators to receive organized, planned, and methodical training that helps them improve in their position (Gaylord et al., 2002). This training should be developed from the state standards and from the competency of the paraeducators according to those standards.

**Law.** Based on a summary of court cases Katsiyannis et al. (2000) concluded that paraeducators who are not appropriately trained are not allowed to be directly involved in providing services to students in special education. Therefore, it is imperative that paraeducators receive training according to standards outlined by the state and local education agencies. The ultimate responsibility for training paraeducators falls with the teachers because they are responsible for student outcomes (Katsiyannis et al., 2000).

**Teacher.** French (1998) studied how resource teachers and paraeducators work together and found that teachers wanted assistance from paraeducators who “had basic knowledge and skills, as well as teaching and behavior management skills” (p. 364). Teachers indicated that paraeducators need training in behavior management and teaching ideas whereas paraeducators wanted training in behavior management and teaching ideas in addition to a broader range of skills such as child development, roles and responsibilities, child abuse, and the history of special education.

During a Utah Paraeducator Conference, professionals agreed there was a great need for Utah paraeducators to be trained in managing student behavior, providing effective instruction, defining their job description, legal issues, and safety and emergency procedures (Morgan & Ashbaker, 1997).

Ultimately, it is the special education teacher’s responsibility to provide training to paraeducators regardless of other training that is possibly provided by state or local educational agencies. Downing et al. (2000) state, “Adequate training for paraeducators prior to starting their job, as well as ongoing monitoring and feedback of their performance while on the job, are critical” (p.179).

**Paraeducator.** In most research involving paraeducators, they mention that they would like more training in order to perform their job effectively. Downing et al. (2000) interviewed paraeducators in an inclusive setting to identify their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. The results of the study indicated that paraeducators thought that training was critical and that they received no training upon being hired. The paraeducators interviewed identified a variety of areas in which they would like training:

- Behavioral interventions
- Specific disabilities and their effects on learning
- Strategies to collaborate
- Adaptations to curriculum
- Physical care
- Basic academic skills
- Computer skills
- Interpersonal skills

The crux of this study helps special educators realize that “people who provide the support [need to be] well trained and supported by professionals” (Downing et al., 2000, p. 179). A study conducted by Chopra et al. (2004) unintentionally revealed the need paraeducators have for more training. During interviews looking at the role of connector for paraeducators, participants commented on work environment issues including lack of training. Being unprepared for a job as a paraeducator due to lack of proper training is clearly a source of frustration. Paraeducators in this study expressed the desire to receive more training in areas such as instructional duties, behavior, roles and responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships.

**Parents.** Parents with children in special education recognize the need for better/more training of paraeducators. Werts et al. (2004) examined parents’ perceptions of the paraeducators’ responsibilities and noted that parents’ main concern was with the training that paraeducators received. The researchers concluded that “training should be included as part of the paraeducator employment requirements” (p. 238).

A survey conducted by Nelson in 2005 measured the perceived impact of the NCLB act on paraeducators. This survey indicated that supervising teachers believe that paraeducators lack

the training, knowledge, and skill necessary to support teachers in instruction, behavior management, and special education rules. Nelson compared paraeducators' perceptions to that of the supervising teacher and found that the higher the education of the paraeducator, the more they perceived themselves as lacking sufficient knowledge. Teachers believe that paraeducators need more training in the rules, behavior management, and instruction.

From their research, Pickett, Vasa, and Steckelberg (1993) indicated that paraeducators need orientation to the school that includes a variety of topics, such as school policies, program goals, emergency procedures, and ethical standards.

Training for paraeducators can be provided in different ways and by different means. Workshops, conferences, videos, and college classes are all appropriate ways of training paraeducators. Regardless of the format of the training, training must be provided. Friend & Cook (2010) wrote that the licensed professional needs to help the paraeducator do their job effectively by "provid[ing] student-specific and context-based information" (p. 145). Classroom teachers should create a plan and take responsibility for the training of paraeducators. It should not be assumed that the training will be done by someone else. When planning with paraeducators, teachers should assign specific responsibilities and tasks to paraeducators; there should be a clear line of communication.

### **Standards**

There is a great need and requirement in the federal law for state standards to be developed to improve the preparation and performance of paraeducators (Gaylord et al., 2002; IDEA, 2001). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) specifically indicates that paraeducators should be knowledgeable about basic educational terminology. Paraeducators should also know the rights and responsibilities of families and children as they relate to

individual learning needs, rules and procedural safeguards regarding the management of behaviors of individuals with exceptional learning needs, and ethical practices for confidential communication about individuals with exceptional learning needs. It is difficult for paraeducators to know their rights and responsibilities unless they are explicitly outlined. Utah has made strides in order to clarify the responsibilities of paraeducators in the state.

Although the federal law allows states to determine the standards for paraeducators, few states have taken the initiative to create these standards (Pickett et al., 2003). In May 1985, the Utah Standards for Paraeducators in Special Education were created under the direction of the director of services for students at risk, Stevan Kuic. A consortium was established in order to “report developments and make recommendations related to the employment, training and supervision of paraeducators” (History of the Paraprofessional Consortium, 2002, p. 1). In 1993–1994, Utah funded a project “Statewide Personnel Development of the Effective Involvement of Paraprofessionals in Special Education” in which the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators were clarified (Wallace & Gerlach, 2001). Those standards have been updated and the Utah State Board of Education approved the current standards for Utah Paraeducators in October of 2003. These standards outline the core competencies and supporting competencies that are deemed as essential for paraeducators in Utah. The core competencies are categorized into four areas that support the NCLB and IDEA definitions of paraeducators and are responsibilities that all paraeducators are expected to perform. The Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals include the following standards:

- Standard 1: Support instructional opportunities
- Standard 2: Demonstrate professionalism and ethical practices
- Standard 3: Support a positive learning environment

- Standard 4: Communicate effectively and participate in the team process (Utah State Office of Education, 2003).

**Standard 1: Support instructional opportunities.** In order to meet the requirements for Standard 1, paraeducators are expected to have a proficient knowledge in basic reading, writing, and math. In addition to being well versed in reading, writing, and math, paraeducators must know some strategies and techniques to present and teach that information. Defining what “proficient knowledge” means is determined by each LEA, and it is expected that the paraeducator that is hired either has the needed knowledge or that the district will provide training. The Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals clearly state that a paraeducator is to teach students only under the direction of the licensed teacher and that when teaching students, they should use direct, explicit instruction using the effective teaching cycle. Additionally, instructional pacing and active student response should be implemented. Another way that paraeducators should support instructional opportunities is through recording relevant information regarding student learning. The first standard lays out the expectations for paraeducators to assist in following lesson plans in order to deliver instruction. They should also be able to record data and keep materials organized in order to support the learning process.

**Standard 2: Demonstrate professionalism and ethical practice.** The second standard outlined is to demonstrate professionalism and ethical practices. Paraeducators must have knowledge of their roles and responsibilities in relationship to the teachers, administration, and others. The Utah Paraeducator Handbook specifies that paraeducators should know where to draw the line when it comes to professional and personal relationships (USOE, 2009). This standard also outlines the need to comply with the law by avoiding deliberately misrepresented information or falsifying information, following policies when using public funds or property,



and avoiding other unethical conduct, including improper relationships with students and the use of alcohol, drugs, and pornography during working hours or on school premises. This standard also includes maintaining confidentiality, having a positive attitude about work, being reliable and punctual, demonstrating sensitivity to cultural differences, and pursuing learning opportunities. According to the second standard, paraeducators are responsible to abide by all the law, regulations, policies, and procedures of the federal and state laws in addition to the LEA regulations. The duties of paraeducators vary depending on the setting they are working in and the type of responsibilities that are assigned to them through their direct supervisor, the special education teacher. Paraeducators are given both instructional and noninstructional responsibilities.

**Standard 3: Support a positive learning environment.** Standard 3 requires knowledge of strategies to engage learners and of implementing behavior intervention plans. Paraeducators should be proactive in eliminating problem behaviors before they arise through praise, modeling appropriate behavior, and planned ignoring. A key part of the responsibility of a paraeducator is to support the supervisor's behavior management plan. Other ways to support a positive learning environment include maintaining an environment conducive to the learning process and helping teach/model social skills, self-control, self-management strategies, and self-care. Included in the standard is also assisting students with medical needs. Knowledge of behavior management strategies is crucial, and paraeducators are expected to show that knowledge in their interactions with the students. They are responsible for teaching and modeling socially appropriate behaviors and helping students to make decisions.

**Standard 4: Communicate effectively and participate in the team process.** The final standard mandates that paraeducators know how to effectively communicate through writing,

speech, and body language. It is imperative that paraeducators know they are part of the instructional team and that effective communication is a crucial part of the skills that they need. Paraeducators have the responsibility to provide relevant feedback and help the teacher make informed decisions regarding the learner's performance. They are expected to use appropriate means to resolve concerns and to help build positive relationships between the school and families or community agencies.

### **Further Research**

Utah has been on the forefront of training for paraeducators as well as creating standards for paraeducators (Pickett et al., 2003; USOE, 2003). However, little research has been done to measure the self-perceived knowledge and abilities of paraeducators, and there has not been any research done in Utah regarding paraeducators self-perceived knowledge based on the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals. Paraeducators who understand these expectations—what they are supposed to know and how they are to act—will arguably be more effective paraeducators.

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent to Be a Research Subject**

### **Introduction**

This research study is being conducted by Mary Buynak to determine paraeducators' perceived knowledge of their roles and responsibilities according to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals. Ms. Buynak is a graduate student from the Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education at Brigham Young University and is supervised by Betty Ashbaker. You were invited to participate because you are a paraeducator employed in the state of Utah and are working in a district that has agreed to participate in this research.

### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will receive a link to the survey via email
- You will complete and submit the survey on Qualtrics
- Total time commitment will be less than 20 minutes

### **Risks/Discomforts**

There are minimal risks for participation in the study. You may feel some discomfort when answering the questions in the survey. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the survey, you may choose to excuse yourself from the study.

### **Benefits**

There may not be any direct benefits to you. However, it is hoped that through your participation the researcher will be able to identify areas where paraeducators require training.

### **Confidentiality**

All information will remain confidential and no identifying information will be linked to your data. Only the researchers will have access to the data.

### **Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without affecting your employment or standing at the school.

### **Questions about the Research**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Mary Buynak, at 801-616-8129, or at [marybuynak@gmail.com](mailto:marybuynak@gmail.com) and/or Betty Ashbaker, at 801-422-8361, or at [Betty\\_Ashbaker@byu.edu](mailto:Betty_Ashbaker@byu.edu).

### **IRB Approval Statement**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact IRB Administrator, (801) 422-1461, A-285 ASB Campus Drive, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu).

By participating in this survey, I agree to the aforementioned terms.

## Survey Instructions

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for volunteering as a participant in this research study. Your district has agreed to participate in this study in order to allow paraeducators in the Granite School District to have a voice to inform better practices in the school systems, specifically within special education. Additionally, the district paraeducator coordinator will be able to use the data collected to adapt training for paraeducators to meet specific needs that are revealed through this survey.

The purpose of this study is to acquire information about paraeducators' perceived knowledge of their responsibilities according to the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals.

The paraeducators participating in this study should be working in an instructional setting with student with disabilities (e.g., special education resource, special education self-contained, inclusion classes, or general education classes).

By participating in the survey, you are giving your consent to be part of this study as indicated at the beginning of the survey.

Click on this link to participate in the survey.

The surveys should take less than 20 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions please call me at 801-616-8129 (cell), 801-374-4955 (work) or email me at [marybuynak@gmail.com](mailto:marybuynak@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Mary Buynak

## Appendix C: Survey

### Demographic Information

What is your age?

- 18–25
- 25–35
- 35–45
- 45+

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your primary language?

- English
- Spanish
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High School Diploma
- Vocational/Technical School (2 years)
- Some College
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree or more

How would you classify yourself?

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- African-American/Black
- Caucasian/White
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Would rather not say
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked as a paraeducator?

What setting do you typically work in?

- General Education Classroom
- Special Education Resource Classroom
- Special Education Self-Contained Classroom
- Special Education Special School
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What age group do you work with?

- Post-Secondary
- High School
- Jr High/Middle School
- Elementary
- Preschool

Who do you primarily work with?

- Special Education Teacher
- General Education Teacher
- Physical Therapist
- Occupational Therapist
- Speech/Language Pathologist
- Other
- Don't Know

Who is your direct supervisor?

- General Education Teacher
- Special Education Teacher
- Department Head
- Physical Therapist/Occupational Therapist
- Don't know

How many hours do you work per week?

Which of the following do you do on a regular basis?

### **Instructional Support**

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not at All
Read individually with student				
Review earlier instruction				
Help with homework/assignments				
Independent practice with small group				
Read tests to students				
One-on-one tutoring				
Academic support in general education classroom				
Provide speech therapy				

### **Clerical Support**

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not at All
Update progress reports				
Translate (e.g., Spanish, sign language)				
Make copies, laminate, etc.				
Run errands				
Grade papers				
Attend meetings				
Attend trainings				
Organize instructional materials				

### **Physical Support**

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not at All
Medical procedures				
Change diapers				
Assist at breakfast and lunch				
Physical restraints				

The following questions are from the Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessional.

Standard 1: Support Instructional Opportunities	None, Somewhat, Very, Extremely			
How much do I know about basic reading/reading readiness?	1	2	3	4
How much do I know about basic math/math readiness?	1	2	3	4
How much do I know about basic writing/writing readiness?	1	2	3	4
How much do I know about teaching strategies and techniques?	1	2	3	4
How well do I assist in delivering instruction according to my supervisor's lesson plan?	1	2	3	4
How well do I record relevant data about learners?	1	2	3	4
How well do I organize material to support learning?	1	2	3	4
How well do I use assessment instruments to document and maintain data?	1	2	3	4
How well do I help students in other settings (e.g., computer lab, playground, library)?	1	2	3	4
How well do I use basic educational technology?	1	2	3	4
How well do I use interventions to adapt to learning needs?	1	2	3	4
How well do I provide documentation for observations and functional assessments of behavior?	1	2	3	4



Standard 2: Demonstrate Professionalism and Ethical Practices	None, Somewhat, Very, Extremely			
How much do I know about of the distinctions in the roles and responsibilities of teachers/providers, paraprofessionals, administrators, families, and other team members?	1	2	3	4
How well do I carry out responsibilities in a manner consistent with all pertinent laws, regulations, policies and procedures?	1	2	3	4
How well do I respect confidentiality?	1	2	3	4
How well do I maintain a positive attitude and contribute to a positive work environment?	1	2	3	4
How well do I maintain reliable attendance, punctuality, and dependability?	1	2	3	4
How well do I exhibit sensitivity to cultural, individual differences and disabilities?	1	2	3	4
How well do I adhere to the civil and human rights of children, youth and their families?	1	2	3	4
How much do I know about health, safety, and emergency procedures?	1	2	3	4
How well do I pursue and participate in staff development and learning opportunities?	1	2	3	4

Standard 3: Support a Positive Learning Environment	None, Somewhat, Very, Extremely			
How well do I use proactive management strategies to engage learners?	1	2	3	4
How well do I support my supervisor's behavior management plan?	1	2	3	4
How well do I demonstrate knowledge of learner characteristics and factors that influence behavior?	1	2	3	4
How well do I assist in maintaining an environment conducive to the learning process?	1	2	3	4
How well do I teach children and youth social skills?	1	2	3	4
How well do I assist learners in using self-control and self-management strategies?	1	2	3	4
How well do I monitor learners and make appropriate decisions while coaching or tutoring in different settings?	1	2	3	4
How well do I provide medical care and/or teaching self-care needs?	1	2	3	4

Standard 4: Communicate Effectively and Participate in the Team Process	None, Somewhat, Very, Extremely			
How well do I serve as a member of an instructional team?	1	2	3	4
How well do I use effective communication skills?	1	2	3	4
How well do I provide relevant feedback and make recommendations regarding learner performance and programming to a supervisor?	1	2	3	4
How well do I participate in instructional team meetings?	1	2	3	4
How well do I collaborate with staff, teachers, and the principal?	1	2	3	4
How well do I use appropriate channels for resolving concerns or conflicts?	1	2	3	4
How well do I participate in conferences with families or primary caregivers when requested?	1	2	3	4
How well do I foster beneficial relationships between agency/school, families, children/youth, and community?	1	2	3	4

What type of training would you like to receive?

- Academic
- Autism
- Behavior
- Collaboration
- Inclusion
- Medical
- Other (please specify)

### Appendix D: Survey Results

Table 11

#### *Results Paraeducators' Self-perceived Perceptions of Abilities*

Demographics		Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Gender	Male	4	4%
	Female	91	96%
Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino	5	5%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2%
	African-American/Black	0	0%
	Caucasian/White	83	87%
	Native Hawaiian	0	0%
	Did not specify	5	5%
Age Range	18–25	7	7%
	26–35	13	14%
	36–45	24	25%
	46+	51	54%
Level of Education	High School Diploma	24	25%
	Vocational/Technical School (2 Years)	4	4%
	Some College	33	35%
	Associate's Degree	19	2%
	Bachelor's Degree	13	14%
	Master's Degree or more	2	2%
Years of Experience	0–2 years	20	21%
	3–5 years	22	23%
	6–10 years	31	33%
	11–15 years	12	13%
	16+ years	10	11%
Work Setting	General Education	6	6%
	Special Education Resource	46	48%
	Special Education Self-Contained	40	42%
	Special Education Special School	3	3%
	Other	0	0%

School Setting	Post-Secondary	0	0%
	High School	5	5%
	Jr High/Middle School	9	9%
	Elementary	81	85%
	Preschool	0	0%
Supervisor	General Education Teacher	2	2%
	Special Education Teacher	86	91%
	Department Head	5	5%
	Physical/Occupational Therapist	0	0%
	Don't know	2	2%
Hours Worked per week	0–10	1	1%
	11–20	14	15%
	21–30	72	76%
	31+	8	8%

Table 12

*Results Responsibilities of Paraeducators*

Which of the following do you do on a regular basis?	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never
Read individually with student (Instructional Support)	62	19	6	8
Review earlier instruction (Instructional Support)	73	15	2	5
Help with homework/assignments (Instructional Support)	52	8	8	27
Independent practice with small group (Instructional Support)	83	7	3	2
Read tests to students (Instructional Support)	13	28	22	32
One-on-one tutoring (Instructional Support)	52	12	8	23
Academic support in general education classroom (Instructional Support)	38	34	7	16
Provide speech therapy (Instructional Support)	6	5	2	82
Update progress reports (Clerical Support)	15	15	62	3
Translate (e.g., Spanish, sign language) (Clerical Support)	7	0	87	1
Make copies, laminate, etc. (Clerical Support)	18	51	16	10
Run errands (Clerical Support)	18	22	10	45
Grade papers (Clerical Support)	18	19	3	55
Attend meetings (Clerical Support)	1	12	27	55
Attend trainings (Clerical Support)	3	1	54	37
Organize instructional materials (Clerical Support)	48	20	9	18
Medical procedures (Physical/Support)	10	1	1	83
Change diapers (Physical/Support)	29	2	3	61
Assist at breakfast and lunch (Physical/Support)	38	4	1	52
Physical restraints (Physical/Support)	3	8	6	78

Table 13

*Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 1: Support Instructional Opportunities*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How much do I know about basic reading/reading readiness?	15	48	31	1
How much do I know about basic math/math readiness?	10	42	42	1
How much do I know about basic writing/writing readiness?	11	40	43	1
How much do I know about teaching strategies and techniques?	10	36	47	2
How well do I assist in delivering instruction according to my supervisor's lesson plan?	38	45	11	1
How well do I record relevant data about learners?	29	42	21	3
How well do I organize material to support learning?	31	45	18	1
How well do I use assessment instruments to document and maintain data?	24	35	27	9
How well do I help students in other settings (e.g., computer lab, playground, library)?	32	45	12	6
How well do I use basic educational technology?	20	49	26	0
How well do I use interventions to adapt to learning needs?	26	46	22	1
How well do I provide documentation for observations and functional assessments of behavior?	24	36	28	7

Table 14

*Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 2: Demonstrate Professionalism and Ethical Practices*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How much do I know about of the distinctions in the roles and responsibilities of teachers/providers, paraprofessionals, administrators, families, and other team members?	23	44	27	1
How well do I carry out responsibilities in a manner consistent with all pertinent laws, regulations, policies and procedures?	44	43	8	0
How well do I respect confidentiality?	74	20	1	0
How well do I maintain a positive attitude and contribute to a positive work environment?	57	34	4	0
How well do I maintain reliable attendance, punctuality, and dependability?	67	27	1	0
How well do I exhibit sensitivity to cultural, individual differences and disabilities?	62	32	1	0
How well do I adhere to the civil, and human rights of children, youth and their families?	65	28	2	0
How much do I know about health, safety, and emergency procedures?	36	43	15	1
How well do I pursue and participate in staff development and learning opportunities?	29	33	29	4



Table 15

*Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 3: Support a Positive Learning Environment*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How well do I use proactive management strategies to engage learners?	27	44	21	3
How well do I support my supervisor, behavior management plan?	50	40	5	0
How well do I demonstrate knowledge of learner characteristics and factors that influence behavior?	27	46	21	1
How well do I assist in maintaining an environment conducive to the learning process?	40	46	9	0
How well do I teach children and youth social skills?	29	51	15	0
How well do I assist learners in using self-control and self-management strategies?	30	44	21	0
How well do I monitor learners and make appropriate decisions while coaching or tutoring in different settings?	26	49	15	5
How well do I provide medical care and/or teaching self-care needs?	18	27	29	21

Table 16

*Results Utah Standards for Instructional Paraprofessionals: Standard 4: Communicate Effectively and Participate in the Team Process*

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	None
How well do I serve as a member of an instructional team?	38	45	9	3
How well do I use effective communication skills?	34	53	8	0
How well do I provide relevant feedback and make recommendations regarding learner performance and programming to a supervisor?	39	40	15	1
How well do I participate in instructional team meetings?	25	28	17	25
How well do I use appropriate channels for resolving concerns or conflicts?	31	47	17	0
How well do I participate in conferences with families or primary caregivers when requested?	22	30	10	33
How well do I foster beneficial relationships between agency/school, families, children/youth, and community?	26	29	21	19
How well do I collaborate with staff, teachers, and the principal?	33	37	15	10

Table 17

*Results Desire for Training in Various Disciplines*

	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Academic	45	47%
Autism	65	68%
Behavior	65	68%
Collaboration	28	29%
Inclusion	30	32%
Medical	22	23%
Other	12	13%

## REFERENCES

- Ashbaker, B. Y., & Morgan, J. (2006). *Paraprofessionals in the classroom*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Ashbaker, B. Y., Young, J. R., & Morgan, J. (2001). *Paraeducators: Their roles in the instructional process*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Dallas, TX.
- Causton-Theoharis, Julie (2009). *The paraprofessional's handbook for effective support in inclusive classrooms*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.
- Chopra, R. V., Sandoval-Lucero, E., Aragon, L., Bernal, C., Berg de Balderas, H., & Carroll, D. (2004). The paraprofessional role of connector. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*(4), 219–231. doi: 10.1177/07419325040250040501
- Council for Exceptional Children (2012). Section 6: Paraeducators serving individuals with exceptional learning needs. In *Role of paraeducator*. Retrieved from [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)
- Daniels, V. I., & McBride, A. (2001). Paraeducators as critical team members: Redefining roles and responsibilities. *NASSP Bulletin, 85*, 66–74. doi: 10.1177/019263650108562308
- Downing, J. E., Ryndak, D., & Clark D. (2000). Paraeducators in inclusive classrooms: Their own perspectives. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*(2), 157–164. doi: 10.1177/074193250002100308
- Fisher, M., & Pleasants, S. (2012). Roles, responsibilities, and concerns of paraeducators: Findings from a statewide survey. *Remedial and Special Education, 33*(5), 287–297. doi: 10.1177/0741932510397762
- French, N. (1998). Working together: Resource teachers and paraeducators. *Remedial and Special Education, 19*(6), 357–368. doi: 10.1177/074193259801900606

- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2010). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Gaylord, V., Wallace, T., Pickett, A. L., and Likins, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Impact: Feature Issue on Paraeducators Supporting Students with Disabilities and At-Risk, 15(2)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration. Retrieved from <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/152>
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, Amendments to \ IDEA Section 612.14B iii (2004).
- Katsiyannis, A., Hodge, J., & Lanford, A. (2000). Paraeducators: Legal and practical considerations. *Remedial and Special Education, 21(5)*, 297–304. doi: 10.1177/074193250002100506
- Morgan, J., & Ashbaker, B. Y. (1997). *Proceedings of the Annual Utah Paraeducator Conference*, Ogden, Utah. Center for Persons with Disabilities, Utah State University, Logan, UT. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED416187.pdf>
- Moshoyannis, T., Pickett, A., & Granick, L. (1999). *The evolving roles and education training needs of teacher and paraprofessional teams in the New York City Public Schools*. New York, NY: City University of New York.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2000). *Education statistics: Elementary and secondary schools and staffing survey*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education, Office of Education Research. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/>
- Nelson, H. G. (2005). *Perceived Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on Paraprofessionals* (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University) Retrieved from: <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/595/>

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 *et. seq.* (2002).

Pickett, A. L. & Gerlach, K. (1997). *Paraeducators in school settings: The future*. In A.L. Pickett & K. Gerlach (Eds), *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach* (pp. 263-267). Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

Pickett, A. L., Likins, M., & Wallace, T. (2003). *The employment and preparation of paraeducators, the state of the art – 2003*. New York City, NY: City University of New York. Retrieved from <http://www.nrcpara.org/resources/employment-and-preparation-paraeducators-state-art-2003>

Pickett, A. L., Vasa, S. F., & Steckelberg, A. L. (1993). *Using paraeducators effectively in the classroom*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Retrieved from [https://archive.org/stream/ERIC\\_ED369732/ERIC\\_ED369732\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/ERIC_ED369732/ERIC_ED369732_djvu.txt)

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation (2013). *The 2013 broad prize for urban education Granite School District Utah*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. Retrieved from [http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/UT\\_GRANITE.pdf](http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/UT_GRANITE.pdf)

Utah Paraprofessional Consortium. (2002). History of the paraprofessional consortium. Retrieved from <http://www.utahparas.org/consortium/history.htm>

Utah State Office of Education (2003). *Utah standards for instructional paraprofessionals*. Retrieved from <http://utahparas.org/standards4paras.pdf>

Utah State Office of Education. (2009). *Utah paraeducator handbook*. Salt Lake City, UT: Handbook Committee (Melina Alexander, Betty Ashbaker, Diana Fillmore, Kit Giddings, Marilyn Likins).

Walker, B. L., (2009). *Paraeducator training necessary to facilitate students with and without disabilities while meeting mandated licensure requirements in an urban mid-Atlantic*

- school system*. (Doctoral dissertation, George Mason University). Retrieved from:  
ProQuest Dissertations and Theses <http://search.proquest.com/docview/622083038>
- Wallace, T., & Gerlach, K. (2001). *State level initiatives related to training and supervision of paraeducators. Quick turn around (QTA)*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education. Retrieved from <http://www.nasde.org/forum>
- Werts, M. G., Harris, S., Tillery, C. Y., & Roark, R. (2004). What parents tell us about paraeducators. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*, 232–239. doi:  
10.1177/07419325040250040601
- Wikipedia, (2014, September 14) *Granite School District*. Retrieved from  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granite\\_School\\_District](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granite_School_District)
- Wikipedia, (2014 August 29), *List of the largest school districts in the United States by enrollment*. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_the\\_largest\\_school\\_districts\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_by\\_enrollment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_largest_school_districts_in_the_United_States_by_enrollment)