Introduction
There has been much discussion about the national teaching shortage, the changing role of teachers in serving children and youth with disabilities, and the increased reliance on paraprofessionals to work with children and youth with some of the greatest needs. But what is the role of the teacher or instructional supervisor in directing the work of paraprofessionals? Administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals responded to a statewide validation survey regarding the importance of various knowledge and skills needed by teachers who direct the work of paraprofessionals, and the extent to which they are currently demonstrated. If skills were not demonstrated, teachers were asked why not — were they not needed, or were the teachers not prepared?

The surveys were designed to:
1) identify the extent to which each statement is perceived as important by Minnesota paraprofessionals, administrators, and teachers who direct the day-to-day work of paraprofessionals; and 2) determine the extent to which each statement is currently practiced in Minnesota schools.

Survey Development
The role of teachers in directing the day-to-day work of paraprofessionals is largely not understood and not well researched. For this reason, researchers conducted focus groups of administrators, paraprofessionals, and teachers from across Minnesota to gather information about what teachers do and/or should do to direct the work of paraprofessionals.

Each focus group was run independently — individuals were with others who were in similar positions. The people invited to participate in the focus groups were recommended by members of the State Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) or the Minnesota Statewide Paraprofessional Consortium as being “effective in their role.”

Focus group participants spent approximately six hours generating responses to stem questions, eliminating duplicate responses, and grouping items. Responses to the questions were summarized across the
News From the State

Happy new year to you all! This next year is going to be rich in resource materials and staff development opportunities. We have the following initiatives occurring —

- Each district is being asked to identify one contact person who is responsible for all paraprofessional staff development. Our intent is to keep close communication with these contacts, providing paraprofessional staff development resources and opportunities for networking. We will also have a direct link and can provide support to the school districts as they implement the staff development legislation.

- Thanks to the work of Dr. Teri Wallace at the Institute on Community Integration (UAP), the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning will receive a copy of the Minnesota Paraprofessional Guide. It is stocked full of our latest resources for paraprofessional staff development. Look for it to arrive soon in your district. If you want extra copies at $8 each, contact the Institute on Community Integration Publications Office at (612) 624-4512.

- The Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning is currently submitting a State Improvement Grant (SIG) that could bring in up to $2,000,000 annually for the next five years. Paraprofessional and teacher staff development are a part of this plan. Light a candle for this one! It would be really great to have these resources to further our paraprofessional staff development efforts.

- The Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium Website (http://ici2.umn.edu/para/). It is the fastest way to get information and keep up to date on current events.

Barbara Jo Stahl, Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning

Celebrate Para Week!

The week of May 1-5 has been designated as Paraprofessional Week in the state of Minnesota. Be sure to celebrate! This is the chance to let the paraprofessionals you work with know that they are appreciated. Throw a party, give certificates of appreciation, buy flowers, send someone to the state conference... just do whatever it is you do well that will show your paras that you care.
Para of the Year Nomination Information

Now is your chance to nominate an outstanding person for Para of the Year! Please include the following information—

Part 1
1. Name of Para
2. Where employed
3. Work address/phone
4. Number of years as a para
5. Number, type, and age of students/clients served
6. Name of Nominator
7. Nominator’s address/phone

Part 2
1. Exemplary work skills such as —
   • Communicating effectively
   • Listening attentively
   • Taking initiative
   • Understanding his or her role in the school community/work setting
2. Unique characteristics —
   • Contributions to the school/work environment
   • Differences made in the lives of students or clients
   • Professional development
3. Include statements of support from students, parents, teachers, and/or peers

Applications accepted until March 31, 2000

Mail or fax this information to —
Anita Cyr, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 111 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, Fax (612) 624-9344.

New Para/Teacher Team of the Year

Please take the time and nominate a positive instructional relationship for new Paraprofessional/Teacher Instructional Team of the Year award! Please include the following information —

Part 1
1. Name of the Para/Teacher Instructional Team
2. Where employed
3. Work address/phone
4. Number of years employed as a para/teacher
5. Number, type, and age of students/clients served
6. Name of Nominator
7. Nominator’s address/phone

Part 2
1. How this para/teacher team exhibits a positive, effective working relationship including —
   • Clear and open communication
   • Respect for each other and students
   • Shared educational philosophy
   • Understanding of team role definition and expectations
2. Characteristics or qualities that set this team apart —
   • Contributions to the school/work environment
   • Differences made in the lives of students?
3. Include statements of support from students, parents, teachers, administration, and/or peers

Applications accepted until March 31, 2000

Mail or fax this information to —
Anita Cyr, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 111 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, Fax (612) 624-9344.
Paraprofessional Training

One of the most important challenges facing public schools is providing the training necessary for a Special Education paraprofessional to develop and enhance the skills, abilities, and competencies necessary for the job to which he or she is assigned. This training needs to begin with the new employee to the program, as well as provide ongoing education for the veteran employee and the employee who may transfer to another area of Special Education where he/she has never worked before. While few would argue this is of major importance, it is a difficult task for schools to carry out.

As funding grows tighter around the nation, state, and in every district, the ability to provide adequate time and skilled training has also been reduced. At a time when we are seeing the most difficult students in the public schools, particularly in the area of behaviors, districts are often not able to allow the training necessary to the paraprofessional staff. In addition, districts have often been forced to reduce the number of hours a paraprofessional works each day to basically student-contact time. While this may be an answer to some funding issues, it raises an entirely new set of problems for the programs trying to provide adequate services to students.

Some of the major issues are: a) finding a duty free time when training can be provided; b) funding for the inservice training; c) providing training for new hires; d) in larger districts, being able to provide the appropriate and varied trainings necessary for the many disabilities represented in the paraprofessional group; e) providing training truly relevant to both paras and certified teachers; and f) providing time when the entire team can meet.

As an administrator, it is difficult to provide the varied trainings needed in the limited amount of staff development time available, yet still make the paraprofessional staff available to the team. Often paraprofessionals have one day (at best) set aside during pre-school workshop days. However, this is also the time the buildings and individual teachers want the paraprofessional available for inservice on site-level information. Often on these days, teachers are pulled into many other meetings and cannot assist with training or be a part of training that is very critical to both certified and non-certified staff.

As a result of these issues, we are often sending paraprofessionals into difficult settings with minimal training, and expecting the training to occur through modeling and on-the-job observation. This is particularly true of the paraprofessional who is hired after the school year has begun, when there is no immediate inservice time available.

I am concerned that our priorities in Special Education staffing are not being addressed. How can we hope to assist children through their many challenges if the people charged with that service are not given adequate training? How can we make employees feel good about themselves and what they do when we are not able to provide minimal guidelines for what is expected of them? How can we provide staff a safe environment in which to work, and assure parents the children are in a safe environment, if we have not addressed the special needs represented?

I believe every administrator and every educator needs to promote more funding and time for inservice to Special Education staff. This may start locally, but must also move beyond that to our state and federal officials, to convince them of the importance of providing funding for training staff dealing with one of the most difficult populations in schools today. We need to encourage applications for grants, applying to local service clubs for available dollars, and tapping every resource available. If we hope to
be successful in molding children’s lives, we must be given the tools with which to work. This can only come from recognition of the need. We need to remember the squeaky wheel gets greased! People may tire of hearing from us, but if we do not advocate for the appropriate training for our staff, and ultimately the appropriate educational programming for children, who will? As a wise man once said, “If we are not part of the solution, then we remain part of the problem!” Change comes slowly, but can happen with dedication and perseverance. Good luck!

Contributed by Wendell J. Erickson, Special Education Supervisor, Willmar Public Schools

“I also strongly believe administrators and staff need to recognize the tremendous job these paras do when they provide service to our students. Respect is not always there. I consider the paras I work with to be equally intelligent and capable and necessary adjunct to implementing a good special education program.”

1999 Survey Teacher

Workshops

Mark Your Calendars Now for These Spring Conferences

- The **8th Annual Statewide Conference for Paraprofessionals**, Hutchinson, Minnesota, May 5–6, 2000. The goal of this conference is to provide paraprofessionals an opportunity to learn about new and different strategies to assist in their jobs and to network with other paraprofessionals. The registration fee has changed this year and is **$50 per person** which includes refreshments, lunch and materials. By attending this conference, paraprofessionals will earn Continuing Education Units. This conference was initiated by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, & Learning, and is sponsored by the Institute on Community Integration (UAP) at the University of Minnesota, Ridgewater College, AFSCME, ECSU, MVASNP, MSEA, and Education Minnesota. For more information, visit the Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium Website at http://ici2.umn.edu/para. Registration will begin in January, 2000.

- The **19th National Paraprofessional Conference**, Portland, Oregon, April 27–29, 2000. This year’s theme is Planning for the Future. Soon you can visit the Website for further details at web.gc.cuny.edu/dept/case/nrcp/.

- The **Council for Exceptional Children’s Annual Convention**, Vancouver, BC., Canada, April 5–8, 2000. Make plans now for the 2000 CEC Convention and Expo. Information regarding convention programming, fees and registration is available at the CEC Website: www.cec.sped.org or contact: CEC, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589, (888)232-7733, email: conteduc@cec.sped.org.

- The **Special Education World Congress 2000**, Vancouver, BC., Canada, April 4-5, 2000, presented in conjunction with the above convention. Attending will provide the opportunity to explore the latest information on current issues in special education with colleagues from around the globe. Further information is available at the CEC Website: www.cec.sped.org.

- **Call for Presentations at the 8th Annual Statewide Conference** (see above). If you have something to share and have not done so already, please fill out the Call for Presentations form in the Fall ParaLink, or contact Anita Cyr at (612) 624-9893 or paralink@icimail.coled.umn.edu. Deadline is February 15.
Limited Training

“We need training!...We need a train the trainer program for training paras as well as teaching staff,” wrote an anonymous administrator, a troubled sigh evident in her words. Her response was typical across the board for administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in response to the recent Survey of Competencies: Individuals who Direct the Work of Paraprofessionals, sent out by the Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium.

The intent of the survey was to identify the importance of competencies needed for teachers and others who direct the work of paraprofessionals. Information was also gathered from respondents regarding the degree to which they thought these competencies were being demonstrated in their situation.

Figure 1 below summarizes the most often cited comments and suggestions, which people took time to add in the open comment section. Included are observations that were made by five or more people. Figure 2 illustrates the number of people in each group who did or did not make comments.

Highlighted below are some

1. Training is limited – need more 103 21 49 33
2. Lack of time 94 10 64 20
3. Difficulty recruiting and/or maintaining quality paraprofessionals 17 2 13 2
4. Opportunity for involvement in team meetings is not provided 15 2 1 12
5. Teachers say that paraprofessionals are a great asset 9 1 8 —
6. Paraprofessionals report feeling very supported 23 — — 23
7. Paraprofessionals report feeling unsupported 18 — — 18
8. Paraprofessionals need certification, licensing or further academic education 17 3 6 8
9. Concerns about a formal evaluation 6 — 2 4
10. Need to educate community on paraprofessional roles 5 — — 5
11. Concerns about low or inconsistent wages 18 1 12 5

“We have had to fill in and ‘teach’ classes. For the most part it is unassisted and we’re expected to provide materials. Some classes are supervised by paras only, by their choice. I feel every class should be headed up by certified staff.”

1999 Survey Paraprofessional
of the main issues discussed. The top two concerns were limited training and lack of time.

Training is Limited
Limited training was the number one concern, with 103 people mentioning it. Lack of financial resources, cited by 17 individuals, appeared to be the main reason.

Eleven respondents felt that the administration, the district, and/or the state were not supportive of paraprofessional training. The skill level of teachers or coordinators as supervisors was a concern. It was felt that more training should be provided to them in the area of supervision both at the college level and/or as ongoing training.

Twelve people thought training of paraprofessionals should be the responsibility of someone other than teachers. Many thought that teachers already have more responsibilities than they should reasonably be expected to handle in a day, and felt that by adding more duties, the students would be the ones to suffer. It was suggested that a person independent of teaching duties, perhaps at the district level, have the sole duty of supervising and training paraprofessionals.

Generic training is not always effective according to five respondents. They suggested that more specialized training should be made available. For example, a media paraprofessional’s training needs are quite different than those of a paraprofessional who works as a special education assistant.

Lack of Time
Lack of time, in general, was brought up by ten administrators, sixty-four teachers and twenty paraprofessionals. This area could be broken down into five separate categories: Time for communication, time for planning, time for staff development/training/supervision, time to accomplish the competencies listed in the survey; and lack of time due, in part, to the large amount of teachers’ paperwork. People could see the importance of doing all of these things, but felt like their hands were tied.

Teachers who spend time apart from the student-contact day to meet with paraprofessionals for ongoing training, coaching, and feedback, appear to be the least stressed and most appreciative of the work paraprofessionals do. The problem, unfortunately, is that many of the teachers and paraprofessionals surveyed commented that paraprofessionals are paid only for the hours when students are present. There is no opportunity for meeting outside the student-contact day.

Other Comments
Many other issues and suggestions were brought up in the open comment section of the survey. For example —

- Inconsistency of wage rates from district to district.
- No formalized evaluation process.
- Lack of availability of subs.
- Changing the title, Para-professional, to various specialized titles which are more indicative of what a person’s position actually entails.
- Questions around what certification would involve.

Space does not allow us to include all of the excellent comments and suggestions, but we have included those which were specified by several people. Clearly, paraprofessionals are valued personnel. The profession has grown and roles have changed faster than supports could be put in place. In Minnesota, administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals must continue to work together to develop creative ways to meet the needs of special education students.

Thank you so much to all who took precious time to participate in the survey, and thank you so much for adding your personal insights in addition to answering the multiple choice style questions.

Contributed by Anita Cyr, ParaLink Editor
focus groups and presented as 30 competency or knowledge and skill statements.

After analyzing and summarizing the information, a validation survey was developed to gather statewide input on the competencies. The competencies for individuals who direct the work of paraprofessionals are statements that indicate the knowledge and skills needed for teachers to successfully work with paraprofessionals in educational settings. Table 1 (page 9) lists a summary of the statements within the subscales.

Participants were asked to answer two questions about each competency —
- How important is it for the person who directs the work of paraprofessionals to do it? (asked of all three groups)
- How often is it demonstrated? (asked of administrators and paraprofessionals)
- Is it being carried out? If not, is it because it is not needed or because the respondent feels unprepared? (asked of teachers)

Prior to distributing the survey, researchers conducted a pilot survey with paraprofessionals (not teachers or administrators). Changes were made based on the feedback we received.

### Participants

Systematic computer sampling of existing mailing lists was used to compile the sample for the study. A sample of administrators and teachers was selected from the mailing lists maintained by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. A systematic computer sampling of names and addresses of paraprofessionals was taken from the ParaLink database.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals who received surveys and the number who responded. Figure 2 shows whether the respondents were from urban, suburban, or rural areas of Minnesota.

### Discussion

In summary, the survey produced the following results —
- All of the competencies are important to all of the respondents.
- Paraprofessionals reported Public Relations and Training as more important than did administrators and teachers.
- Administrators and paraprofessionals reported more positively on the importance scale than they did on the demonstration scale. That is, the competencies are important but not happening, except for Modeling for Paraprofessionals, which administrators believed was happening more than the others did.
Table 1. Subscale Description of Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale Description of Competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills needed to effectively communicate, share student-related information, provide opportunities for collaboration, and clarify roles of the paraprofessional with team members and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills needed to coordinate schedules, establish goals, set plans, establish time for planning and information sharing, and consider strengths and interests of paraprofessionals when aligning tasks and determining schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills needed to provide regular feedback regarding each paraprofessional’s work performance, managing resources related to student instruction, supporting paraprofessionals in providing instruction to children and youth, and provide assistance and direction to paraprofessionals who work in independent capacities, such as community work settings, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling for Paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills needed to model for paraprofessionals a caring and respectful manner when interacting with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills needed to inform administrators, teachers, and parents of the responsibilities and roles paraprofessionals have in the educational program; and advocate for the paraprofessional regarding training and leave time, modifications in responsibility, involvement in decision groups, and other issues of importance to paraprofessionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills needed to provide opportunities for on-the-job training for paraprofessional skill development, educate paraprofessionals of their legal rights and responsibilities regarding their student interaction, services, and instructional programming, and advocate for school and district to provide inservice training opportunities that are directly related to the daily work of paraprofessionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills needed to describe, to each paraprofessional, their roles and responsibilities; maintain regular positive and supportive interaction with paraprofessionals, and contribute to the evaluation of paraprofessional performance with the intent of assisting paraprofessional skill improvement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Significantly more teachers reported carrying out the competencies than administrators or paraprofessionals thought they did in the following subscales —
  - Planning and Scheduling
  - Instructional Support
  - Training
  - Management of Paraprofessionals

- Paraprofessionals were more likely than administrators to feel that teachers did not demonstrate or carry out the competencies needed to direct the work of paraprofessionals.

- Teachers reported that they do not feel prepared to Train and Manage paraprofessionals.

What Next?
The next steps for our work include: 1) developing clear competency statements needed by teachers who direct the work of paraprofessionals, 2) designing inservice training materials to support the competencies, 3) conducting statewide training for teachers and administrators working in Minnesota schools, and 4) working with teacher training programs at institutions of higher education to infuse the competencies into their preparation programs.

Contributed by Teri Wallace, Jongho Shin, Tom Bartholomay and Barbara Jo Stahl
Strategies for Paraprofessionals Who Support Individuals with Disabilities

The Institute on Community Integration wishes to introduce a training curriculum for working with paraprofessionals. It includes five modules that can be used individually or in conjunction with each other. However, beginning with The Paraprofessional: An Introduction is recommended. Each module comes in facilitator and student versions; each version is sold separately.

The modules are: 1.) The Paraprofessional: An Introduction, 2.) Providing Cross-Cultural Support Services to Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families, 3.) Positive Behavior Strategies for Paraprofessionals, 4.) Early Childhood: The Role of the Paraprofessional, and 5.) Transition: The Role of the Paraprofessional.

Cost is $15 for each facilitator module and $10 for each student module. (Note: Instructors may wish to purchase one student module from which to duplicate copies for all students.)

Send your order to Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 109 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455; Phone: (612) 624-4512, Fax: (612) 624-9344. Minnesota residents add 6.5% sales tax.

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Service (OSERS)

OSERS supports programs that assist in educating children with special needs, provides for the rehabilitation of youth and adults with disabilities, and supports research to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. For more information, check out its Website at: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

OSEP is a component of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), which is one of the principle components of the US Department of Education. OSEP’s mission focuses on the free appropriate education of children and youth with disabilities from birth through age 21. For more information, its Website is located at: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP.

The Metropolitan Educational Cooperative Service Unit (ECSU)

ECSU’s goal is to find creative, cost-effective approaches to help students with disabilities through state-funded programs. Its Website provides information on workshops, conferences and networks in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Check it out at: www.ecsu.k12.mn.us.

Workshop on Augmentative Communication Systems/Devices

This excellent workshop, taught by specialists, is available to come to your district through Intermediate School District 287. If you use electronic and non-electronic augmentative communication systems with your students (pre-kindergarten to adults), this workshop is for you! It will address: 1) Why does my student have voice output? He/she never uses it!, 2) What do I do with the device during gym? Or does my student have to have it along at all times?, 3) It doesn’t say what my student needs it to say...What now?, 4) When will I be done programming this thing?, 5) What do I do if the other kids want to play with the device?, and 6) People still talk to me instead of the student... For more information on how you can bring this workshop to your district, contact Linda Rees, Assistive Technology Program Facilitator, at (651) 550-7185.
Minnesota Paraprofessional Speakers Network

The following questionnaire has been developed to assist in preparing a network of speakers to address the core and specialized competencies identified as expectations of all paraprofessionals working in Minnesota schools. Many districts are looking for speakers to assist in the preparation of paraprofessionals. We hope this network will connect you with those who need training. As a member of this network, we will share information with you about new materials and resources. Please complete the following information and return it as soon as possible. Share this form with others who might be interested. Thank you!

Name

Place of Employment                        Position Title

Address

City            State            Zip Code

(______) ____________________________  (______) ____________________________
Telephone           Fax

Please indicate the competency areas in which you have experience as a speaker —

- Philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of special education
- Characteristics of learners
- Assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation
- Instructional content and practice
- Supporting the teaching and learning environment
- Managing student behavior
- Communication and collaborative partnerships
- Professionalism and ethical practices
- Early childhood — home visitor programs
- Early childhood — center-based programs
- Transition to work and adult life
- Providing support in the general education setting
- Physical and other health impairments
- Instructional technology
- Other

I give my permission to the Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium to communicate my name as a potential speaker. I understand that particular arrangements for my involvement as a speaker will be negotiated by me and the potential agency, organization, or individual for whom I might be speaking. I further understand that my work as a speaker may be evaluated by the Consortium as well as an employing agency or organization, and give my permission for this evaluation.

Signature                                      Date

Please attach —
- A copy of your resume or vitae
- Three references
- Your contact information

Please return to —
Teri Wallace
Institute on Community Integration
University of Minnesota
111 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455
Tel. (612) 626-7220  Fax (612) 624-9344
“Training the people who supervise paraprofessionals is extremely important and a step that has been definitely overlooked. As the person who trains and organizes training for paraprofessionals, I’m concerned that there hasn’t been an opportunity to train paras and staff together. I find that these competencies are all important, and, for the most part, more likely to happen at elementary than Junior-Senior High school level. It also varies depending on the supervising teacher — some are more skilled than others.”

1999 Survey Administrator

“I do not believe teachers have the responsibility for making sure paras are properly trained. I think this is a district responsibility. I am very concerned about teacher skill/training in supervision, directing work, etc. I think paraprofessionals are poorly supervised in general because there are so many of them that the principals don’t have the same level of involvement as with teachers, and teachers don’t want to create problems in their programs. There is little time in a day for the level of coordination needed and this is a bad situation, but it is reality. Basically, teachers need training.”

1999 Survey Administrator