JOB SATISFACTION OF PARAPROFESSIONALS
IN MISSOURI SCHOOLS

By

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ABSTRACT

This study was completed to determine possible relationships in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals in Missouri to levels of training in the field of education, opportunities for participation in professional development, and rates of pay. This study was conducted through surveys that were sent to paraprofessionals in twelve school districts throughout the state of Missouri. The surveys consisted of questions concerning educational background, previous field experience, teacher certification status, annual salary, whether or not the paraprofessional worked a second job, availability of professional development, and amounts of feedback received from cooperating teachers. Paraprofessionals were divided into two focus groups—one consisting of those who were within the first five years of employment in their school districts, and the other consisting of those were long-term employees. Findings of this study show that paraprofessionals who are trained in the field of education undergo decreases in job satisfaction after remaining in their positions for a long-term basis. Paraprofessionals on the lower end of the salary schedule could not compare their salaries to those who receive more than $25,000 per year because such circumstances are extremely rare in the state of Missouri, yet lower salaries have not prevented paraprofessionals from remaining in their employment for the long term. Paraprofessionals have expressed a need for more professional development opportunities, but this need has not kept them from remaining with their school districts on a long-term basis. Future studies should compare the job satisfaction of paraprofessionals in Missouri to those in other states.
INTRODUCTION

Background, Issues, and Concerns

Paraprofessionals are employed by school districts to provide assistance to teachers, mainly those in special education programs, in providing one-on-one and/or group instruction to students who have additional needs that cannot be met exclusively by one or more individual classroom teachers. Educational requirements for paraprofessionals may vary due to school district policies. While some school districts offer competitive pay rates for paraprofessionals, there are many paraprofessionals who feel that they are not paid a suitable living wage. Some paraprofessionals have been educated as certified teachers, while others may have little or no background in the field of education. In many cases, their training is “on the job” (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). Statistics from the National Education Association show that 42% of paraprofessionals have earned an associate’s degree or higher, 20% have earned a bachelor’s degree, and 30% have at least 15 years of experience (National Education Association, 2014). Some paraprofessionals have opportunities for career growth through district professional development, but others who wish to participate in such trainings are unable to do so due to time and money issues. The pay rates of paraprofessionals do not always reflect the work that they do, and they often do not receive adequate training that would allow them to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

In the past, paraprofessionals usually sat on the sidelines and assisted students and special education teachers with specific duties. This has changed drastically over the past fifteen years. Now they provide instruction to individual students and to small groups in classrooms for students with special needs, and they are also responsible for seeing that these students are meeting the requirements of the Common Core Standards. Currently, there are 830,000
Paraprofessionals in public schools throughout the United States, compared to only 500,000 in 1990 (Finkel, 2014). Paraprofessionals are also required to assist students with behavior management, social skills, and physical challenges. These increased duties are a result of the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Rosales, 2014). In 2013, the average salary of a paraprofessional was $21,346. In some school districts, professional development for paraprofessionals has been eliminated due to budget cuts, or it simply never existed in the first place. These issues have created a substantial amount of stress for paraprofessionals, leading to job dissatisfaction (Finkel, 2014). According to the National Education Association (NEA), the majority of paraprofessionals feel that their job descriptions do not clearly define their job duties, 45% are asked to perform tasks that are not specified with their job description, and 19% do not have a written job description at all (National Education Association, 2014).

Practice under Investigation

Many paraprofessionals have at least a bachelor’s degree and are trained in the field of education. However, they typically are not paid a living wage. Some cannot participate in professional development at school because such opportunities are offered exclusively to classroom teachers, and others cannot afford to do it on their own time. These issues often lead to job dissatisfaction.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

The annual salaries, professional development opportunities, education levels, and years of work experience of paraprofessionals in urban, suburban, and rural areas of Missouri will be analyzed and compared using statistics collected from a survey administered to paraprofessionals via Survey Monkey. Members of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Team in the Ionia County
(Michigan) Intermediate School District believe that the process for hiring paraprofessionals should include personal interviews and writing samples. Once these people are hired, their assignments should be determined on the basis of experience, skills, and personal preferences (Macfarlane, 2007). However, this does not happen in most school districts in Missouri.

According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, paraprofessionals whose positions are dependent on federal funding must have earned at least 60 hours of college credits or have earned a passing score on the ParaPro Assessment through the Educational Testing Service (ETS) (2014). The average salary for a beginning paraprofessional in Missouri is $16,877, which is less than the national average of $18,260. The average salary for an experienced paraprofessional in Missouri is $26,167, while the national average is $28,820 (Business and Legal Resources, 2011).

Conceptual Underpinning

In many of today’s schools, full-time paraprofessionals outnumber the full-time teachers, and unlike paraprofessionals in previous decades, their job duties may include one-on-one and/or group instruction (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). Due to increasing numbers of students who are eligible for special education services, the number of paraprofessionals is expected to increase by ten percent over the next few years (Boudreau & Twigg, 2011). NCLB requires federally-funded paraprofessional positions to be filled by individuals who have completed at least two years of college and/or earned passing scores on state assessment tests (National Education Association, 2014). Special education teachers are expected to provide supervision for their paraprofessionals, but most do not receive any training in this area. Therefore, the majority of training that paraprofessionals undergo is through situations that happen while working with their students at school (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). Various studies have
revealed that most school districts do not provide specific job duties and guidelines for paraprofessionals, which often leads to confusion for both paraprofessionals and the teachers who are responsible for their supervision. Although IDEA requires proper training and supervision of paraprofessionals, it does not specify any particular trainings that should be administered (Boudreau & Twigg, 2011). George Giuliani, executive director of the National Association of Special Education teachers, made the observation that most paraprofessionals consider their work to be rewarding, but they have to deal with high stress levels and low pay (Christie, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

While many paraprofessionals are happy in their positions, a significant amount of turnover exists due to career opportunities in education and in other areas of work, lack of adequate pay, and fewer opportunities for professional development and growth. Some of these issues lead to burnout for paraprofessionals. There are significant shortages of special education teachers, which means that existing special education teachers are constantly gaining more responsibilities. Since it is not possible for these teachers to meet all of these expectations, paraprofessionals now have job duties that go beyond serving as an assistant to the teacher and as a supervisor of students (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). Although it is true that the educational requirements for teachers are still higher than those of paraprofessionals, the job requirements of both teachers and paraprofessionals have become closer to equal in terms of time and labor. However, the salaries of paraprofessionals are usually at least 50% lower than those of their cooperating teachers. Paraprofessionals have to address behavioral issues to prevent disruptions to the teacher and the other students that he or she is teaching. They also have to provide assistance with social skills, mobility, hygiene, and toileting.
Purpose of the Study

To determine the relationship between level of training and job satisfaction of special education paraprofessionals
To determine the relationship between rate of pay and job satisfaction of special education paraprofessionals

Research Questions

RQ#1: Is there a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who are trained in the field of education compared with paraprofessionals who are not trained in the field of education?

RQ#2: Is there a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who participate regularly in professional development compared with paraprofessionals who do not or cannot participate regularly in professional development?

RQ#3: Is there a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who receive higher rates pay compared with paraprofessionals who receive lower rates of pay?

Null Hypotheses

Ho#1: There is no difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals trained in the field of education compared with paraprofessionals not trained in the field of education.

Ho#2: There is no difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who participate regularly in professional development compared with paraprofessionals who do not or cannot participate regularly in professional development.

Ho#3: There is no difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who receive higher rates of pay compared with paraprofessionals who receive lower rates of pay.
Anticipated Benefits of the Study

By providing paraprofessionals with a forum to express the positive and negative aspects of their job situations, the students with whom they work will benefit due to changes this study may influence in their schools. Paraprofessionals who participate in this study will be able to notify colleagues who may want to participate as well, allowing them to express their thoughts and concerns through anonymous surveys.

Paraprofessionals who participate in this study will benefit because it will offer them a way to express both positive and negative aspects of their working conditions. Since most paraprofessionals are at-will employees, they may be afraid to openly express concerns about the negative aspects of their jobs. Some paraprofessionals feel they are financially unable to join Missouri National Education Association or other professional organizations for school employees, and others who are members of MNEA are still unsure about expressing their concerns to their local leaders. By expressing their concerns through this study, they may influence changes in their schools.

This study will benefit school superintendents, human resources directors, special education directors, and principals by providing them with insight regarding the positive and negative aspects of working as a paraprofessional. These people will be able to see how their districts compare with others in terms of pay rates, educational requirements, professional development and training opportunities, and supervision of paraprofessionals. Special education department leaders and special education teachers who have paraprofessionals in their classrooms will be able to gain insight regarding the supervision, positive feedback, and constructive criticism that is needed and/or wanted by their paraprofessionals.
Missouri National Education Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association, has chapters in many public school districts in Missouri. In some school districts, there are separate MNEA organizations for teachers and for education support professionals, yet in others, their organizations are wall-to-wall, meaning that they serve all school employees regardless of job title. The mission of MNEA is “to serve as the united voice to promote, advance, and protect public education, and to advocate for the rights and interests of students and our members” (Missouri National Education Association, 2014). This study will benefit MNEA leaders in school districts and at the state level by helping them become more aware of both positive and negative factors that affect paraprofessionals in Missouri schools.

Definition of Terms

*At-will employee:* An employee who can be terminated by his or her employer without being given a specific reason or any reason at all (U.S. Legal, 2014)

*Common Core Standards:* Educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade students in the areas of language arts, literacy, and mathematics (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014)

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP):* A written plan created for a student in a special education program to meet his or her unique educational needs. This plan is created through feedback from special education teachers, regular education teachers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, parents, and other people who are involved in the child’s education (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014)

*Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA):* A law that governs the ways in which states and public agencies provide educational services to children with disabilities in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2014)
Missouri National Education Association (MMEA): A union and professional organization for employees of public school districts in Missouri; a state affiliate of National Education Association (Missouri National Education Association, 2014)

National Education Association (NEA): A national organization for employees in the field of education, with affiliates in every state (National Education Association, 2014)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act: A federal law, created in 2001, requiring all schools, districts, and states to show that students are achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014), and for the purpose of closing achievement gaps by providing all children with fair and equal opportunities to obtain a high-quality education (Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2014).

Paraprofessional ("para"): A special education employee who, while not being required to hold a teaching certificate, performs academic, social, and hygienic tasks with individual students and/or groups of students (Mauro, 2014). Other terms for paraprofessionals include: assistant teacher, teacher aide, teacher assistant (TA), instructional assistant (IA), educational technician (ed tech), paraeducator, and special education aide

Summary

Paraprofessionals play an important role in today’s schools, particularly in the area of special education. While many of them have obtained higher levels of education, they do not always receive adequate training that would allow them to perform their job duties in ways that would benefit both students and supervising teachers. Rates of pay do not always reflect the degrees of difficulty experienced or educational levels achieved by paraprofessionals. Job dissatisfaction is a common result of these issues.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term *paraprofessional*, which includes the prefix “para,” meaning “at the side of,” suggests that the person works beside an educational professional (teacher). While this was common practice in the past, it is not typical in today’s schools. Instead, the paraprofessional works beside the student instead of the teacher. This is a result of the use of inclusionary methods, higher academic standards, changes in legislation for special education programs, and shortages of qualified special education teachers. Rather than providing education exclusively in self-contained classrooms, these students are often included in regular education classes. Since they usually need more one-on-one assistance than the classroom teacher has time to offer, individual students in these situations are provided with a paraprofessional. While a student is likely to benefit from this form of individualized assistance, it is too common for regular education teacher to neglect his or her teaching responsibilities for this student. This means that the paraprofessional has to teach the lessons to the student, although he or she may not be qualified to do so. While IDEA states that paraprofessionals are permitted and encouraged to assist with academic instruction of students with disabilities, they are not supposed to serve as surrogates for teachers of these students (French, 2003).

Paraprofessionals often feel that they do not receive adequate amounts of training to ensure that they are successful in their work with their assigned students and classes. According to a study of 313 paraprofessionals in an unspecified Midwestern state, training was provided in the areas of maintaining confidentiality of students, educational terminology, and the effects of specific disabilities. Paraprofessionals who participated in this study specified needs and desires for training in forms of assistive technology that are utilized by students with disabilities, safety strategies for behavior management, and characteristics of proper communication with
Paraprofessionals

colleagues who work with the same students (Carter, O’Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2008). NCLB legislation refers to qualifications and duties of paraprofessionals, but it does not specify any particular trainings and/or forms of professional development that they should have. The roles of paraprofessionals have grown in recent years, so it is necessary for trainings to be updated to ensure that they are successful in their work with students who receive special education services. Andragogy Theory, which focuses on involvement of adults in the planning of training that is relevant to their professionals and personal lives, can be utilized to ensure that paraprofessionals are prepared for the duties in their work. Social Learning Theory is also beneficial to paraprofessionals because it promotes observational learning. It is common for paraprofessionals to be “on the job” learners, and they can learn through observation of teachers and other paraprofessionals through their daily interactions with students (Boudreau & Twigg, 2011). A school district in Colorado implemented a yearly professional development program for paraprofessionals. Training topics included, but were not limited to, autism spectrum disorder, assistive technology, response to intervention, and roles and responsibilities (McKenzie, 2011).

Lack of information and/or feedback from cooperating teachers is a common concern of today’s paraprofessionals. One-on-one paraprofessionals in middle schools and high schools are likely to travel to each class with one student, which means that they will work with several teachers throughout the school day. Paraprofessionals who serve as classroom aides may also work with various teachers during a typical school day (Cobb, 2007). In these situations, a paraprofessional might have more accurate and direct knowledge of a particular student’s abilities and difficulties than his or her teachers, but the majority of special education programs do not permit involvement of paraprofessionals in the IEP process. However, some school
districts have allowed paraprofessionals to become involved in data collection for IEP goals. Special education teachers in these districts now meet with their paraprofessionals on a weekly basis, which has resulted in higher job retention rates of paraprofessionals (McKenzie, 2011).

While most paraprofessionals admit that they did not enter the education profession with the hopes of earning large amounts of money, hourly pay rates and annual salaries are a major concern. Sherry Webster, a paraprofessional in Florida, stated in an article in the Orlando Sentinel that she had already been working a second job as a caregiver in an after-school program. However, one extra job did not provide her with enough income to support her family, so she accepted a position at Target as her third job (Reed, 1995). Although nearly twenty years have passed, other paraprofessionals continue to struggle with their income. Jean Fay (2011) of Crocker Farm School in Amherst, Massachusetts, states, “I have a wonderful job. As a public school paraprofessional, I help teach kindergarteners to read…But the pay is low. So I also work part-time in the jewelry department at JC Penney” (para. 1 & 5).

A paraprofessional who participated in a study in the Midwest, provided the following comment to Mary Fisher of Indiana University and Stacia L. Pleasants (2012) of Ivy Tech Community College:

“We have a problem with major turnover each year because the pay is so low—a grocery store checkout person is paid more! We work directly with the students, yet often the students we work with earn more money at their part-time jobs. That makes it hard to find good paraprofessionals” (p. 292).

Officials from NEA, the largest professional organization for education employees in the United States, have expressed concerns regarding the living wages of paraprofessionals. The
organization is working to convince federal education officials to ensure that all education support professionals earn at least $28,000 per year (National Education Association, 2014).
RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A study was conducted to analyze aspects of the jobs of paraprofessionals in the field of education. The independent variable, years of experience, was divided into two groups: paraprofessionals with less than one year and no more than five years of experience (newer employees), and paraprofessionals with six or more years of experience (long-term employees). The dependent variables were certification status (not certified as a teacher or certified/certification pending), availability of professional development opportunities (little to no professional development and significant amounts of professional development), and salaries of paraprofessionals (less than $25,000 per year or $25,000 per year or higher). If pay rates, professional development opportunities, and education levels attained by paraprofessionals are proven to have a negative effect on the job satisfaction of paraprofessionals, supervising teachers and human resources personnel should be informed so improvements can be made in order to promote retention of highly qualified paraprofessionals.

Study Group Description

Paraprofessionals from twelve public school districts in Missouri were evaluated for this study. To ensure the best possible representation of paraprofessionals throughout the state, school districts were selected on the basis of location, size, and urban, suburban, or rural status. Districts from the Kansas City metropolitan area, the St. Louis metropolitan area, and from cities and rural communities in northern, southern, eastern, and western Missouri were chosen for this study.
Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data from surveys administered via Survey Monkey to paraprofessionals in twelve Missouri school districts was collected for a study on job satisfaction of paraprofessionals. Respondents were informed that all surveys were anonymous and confidential, and that participation was strictly on a voluntary basis. Respondents were also informed that they could decline to answer any particular question on the survey if they wished to do so. Participants in each school district received the same survey, although the job terminology for paraprofessionals was edited to match those of each district. For example, if paraprofessionals were known as teacher assistants in a particular district, the survey for respondents in that district utilized this term. Each survey consisted of nine questions regarding educational background, grade level in which the paraprofessional worked, salary, professional development, years of experience, and teacher certification status, along with a designated section for the paraprofessional to provide additional information about his or her job and any comments or concerns that he or she may have. (See Appendix A for survey instrument).

Statistical Analysis Methods

A Chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether there is a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who are trained in the field of education compared with paraprofessionals who are not trained in the field of education, a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who participate regularly in professional development compared with paraprofessionals who do not or cannot participate regularly in professional development, and a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who receive higher rates pay compared with paraprofessionals who receive lower rates of pay. The source was divided into two categories: paraprofessionals with less than one to five years of experience in their respective school districts
(newer employees) and paraprofessionals with 6 or more years of experience in their respective school districts (long-term employees).

A frequency plot was calculated to determine the percentages of survey participants who had either less than one to five years of experience as a paraprofessional or six or more years of experience as a paraprofessional. A crosstab/contingency was calculated to determine relationships between job satisfaction of paraprofessionals and levels training in the field of education, participation in professional development, and rates of pay. The alpha level was set at 0.25 to test each null hypothesis.
FINDINGS

Paraprofessionals in twelve school districts in various areas of the state of Missouri participated in this study of relationships between job satisfaction and training in the field of education, opportunities for professional development, and rates of pay. Chi-square analysis methods were utilized for investigation of survey results. For this study, paraprofessionals were categorized as newer employees (less than one year to five years of experience) and long-term employees (six or more years of experience). Study participants within these two groups were analyzed according to whether or not they had obtained teacher certification, opportunities for taking part in professional development, and yearly salaries. Respondents were analyzed through a frequency plot, and each statistic concerning job satisfaction was analyzed through a crosstab/contingency.
As seen in Figure 1, 138 respondents participated in this study regarding the job satisfaction of paraprofessionals in Missouri schools. The majority of respondents consisted of paraprofessionals who had six or more years of experience (long-term employees), and the remaining 47.1% of respondents were paraprofessionals who had between less than one and five years of experience (newer employees). Years of experience was chosen as the independent
variable due to possibilities that the dependent variables could influence whether or not a 
paraprofessional chose to remain in his or her position.

**RQ#1: Is there a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who are trained in 
the field of education compared with paraprofessionals who are not trained in the field of 
education?**

Table 1

Summary of Chi-Square Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>&lt;1-5 yrs. Exp. (Newer Employee)</th>
<th>6+ yrs. Exp. (Long-Term Employee)</th>
<th>Chi Sq</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Certified and/or Trained in Ed.</td>
<td>47.7% (31)</td>
<td>74.0% (54)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified/Pending Cert. in Ed.</td>
<td>52.3% (34)</td>
<td>26.0% (19)</td>
<td>10.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The p-value is 0.02. The alpha level is 0.25.

The null hypothesis is that there is no difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals trained in the field of education compared with paraprofessionals not trained in the field of education.

The conclusion is that there is a significant difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals trained in the field of education compared to paraprofessionals not trained in the field of education.

As shown in Table 1, a significant difference [Chi-square (1) = 10.01, p-value = 0.02] in job satisfaction between Missouri paraprofessionals trained in the field of education and Missouri paraprofessionals not trained in the field of education was found, which means that the null hypothesis is rejected. The percentage of non-certified long-term employees (74.0%) was considerably higher than the percentage of certified long-term employees in terms of job satisfaction. However, the percentage representing job satisfaction for certified newer
employees was only 4.6% larger than that of non-certified newer employees. Job satisfaction of certified paraprofessionals appears to decrease once they become long-term employees, but the opposite appears to be true for non-certified paraprofessionals. This may be due to certified employees having more knowledge of teaching and classroom management methods, while non-certified employees may be learning about educational processes for the first time through their experiences in working with students. Additional research should be conducted to test the validity of this study. Other factors to take into consideration may include: paraprofessionals certified in regular education but not special education, paraprofessionals certified in regular education who are working on special education certification, and the education requirements of paraprofessionals in individual school districts.

RQ#2: Is there a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who participate regularly in professional development compared with paraprofessionals who do not or cannot participate regularly in professional development?

Table 2
Summary of Chi-Square Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>≤1-5 yrs. Exp. (Newer Employee)</th>
<th>6+ yrs. Exp. (Long-Term Employee)</th>
<th>Chi Sq</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little to No Prof. Develop.</td>
<td>72.3% (47)</td>
<td>74.0% (54)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Prof. Develop.</td>
<td>27.7% (18)</td>
<td>26.0% (19)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The p-value is 0.83. The alpha level is 0.25.

The null hypothesis is that there is no difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who participate regularly in professional development compared with paraprofessionals who do not or cannot participate regularly in professional development.
The conclusion is that there is not a significant difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who participate regularly in professional development compared with paraprofessionals who do not or cannot participate regularly in professional development. As displayed in Table 2, no significant difference [Chi-square (1) = 0.0f, p-value = 0.83] in job satisfaction between paraprofessionals who participate regularly in professional development and those who do not or cannot participate regularly in professional development was found. This study shows that 74.0% of long-term employees receive little to no professional development, which is only slightly above the percentage for newer employees who receive little to no professional development. The percentage of newer Missouri paraprofessionals in receiving positive amounts of professional development was 27.7, which is only 1.7% higher than that of long-term Missouri paraprofessionals receiving professional development on a regular basis. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. There is a possibility that paraprofessionals with teacher certification do not feel a strong need for additional professional development due to the training received through coursework. If more research is conducted, an additional factor to consider is the educational qualifications for hiring paraprofessionals in each school district.
RQ#3: Is there a difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who receive higher rates of pay compared with paraprofessionals who receive lower rates of pay?

Table 3
Summary of Chi-Square Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>&lt;1-5 yrs. Exp. (Newer Employee)</th>
<th>6+ yrs. Exp. (Long-Term Employee)</th>
<th>Chi Sq</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $25,000/year</td>
<td>98.5% (64)</td>
<td>98.6% (72)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000/year or higher</td>
<td>1.5% (1)</td>
<td>1.4% (1)</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The p-value is 0.93. The alpha level is 0.25.

The null hypothesis is that there is no difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who receive higher rates of pay compared with paraprofessionals who receive lower rates of pay.

The conclusion is that there is not a significant difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who receive higher rates of pay compared with paraprofessionals who receive lower rates of pay.

Table 3 shows that no significant difference [Chi-square (1) = 0.007, p-value = 0.93] in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who receive higher rates of pay compared with paraprofessionals who receive lower rates of pay was found. According to the study, 98.5% of paraprofessionals in Missouri with less than five years of experience earn less than $25,000 per year, which is only 0.1% lower than that of long-term Missouri school paraprofessionals who earn less than $25,000 per year. Only 1.5% of newer paraprofessionals and only 1.4% of long-term paraprofessionals earned $25,000 or higher per year. This may be due to the fact that it is rare for a paraprofessional to earn more than $25,000 per year in the state of Missouri. Annual salaries for paraprofessionals, regardless of experience, typically range from $19,000 to $21,000. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. However, it is uncommon for paraprofessionals to
have annual salaries above $25,000. A study comparing the salaries of paraprofessionals in Missouri to those in other states might produce extremely different results. Additional research should be conducted to test the accuracy of this study. Other factors to examine may include: yearly pay raises, health insurance benefits that may or may not require deductions from regular paychecks, and differences in pay rates on the basis of experience and/or education.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study demonstrate that there is a significant difference in job satisfaction of paraprofessionals who have been trained as teachers and those who have received little or no training in the field of education. Non-certified Missouri paraprofessionals who remain in their positions on a long-term basis are likely to be content with learning new skills through their experiences with students instead of being trained through traditional teacher preparation programs. Long-term paraprofessionals who have earned teaching certificates are likely to experience less job satisfaction due to not being able to use their teaching skills to the fullest extent.

According to the crosstab/contingency for Missouri paraprofessionals who receive little to no professional development compared to those who receive such training on regular basis, there was not a significant difference between the two groups. Paraprofessionals with six or more years of employment in their school districts did not experience more discontent with their positions than those who had been with their districts for five years or less. Previous studies have shown that many paraprofessionals feel that they do not receive enough training, or that the professional development offerings from their school districts are irrelevant to them, so one can question the fact that the null hypothesis was not rejected. Further studies should examine the professional development needs of individual paraprofessionals in relation to their educational backgrounds.

Analysis of the chi-square calculations for job satisfaction of paraprofessionals in terms of salary indicate that paraprofessionals in Missouri who earn at least $25,000 per year are not more satisfied with their employment than those who earn less than that amount. However, a very small number of participants in the survey actually earned more than $25,000, which may
have caused the results to be misleading. To gain a more accurate view of job satisfaction in terms of salary, the availability, occurrences, and amounts of annual pay raises in each school district should be examined.

Results of the survey indicate that a majority of the respondents believed they did not have enough opportunities for training and/or professional development within their school districts, yet most were in agreement that they received sufficient amounts of positive feedback and constructive criticism from their cooperating teachers. Although a majority of the respondents did not have a teaching certificate, nearly half of that amount had earned or were in the process of obtaining certification. Teacher recruitment programs in other states have been successful at gaining paraprofessionals as candidates for their programs (Clewell & Villegas, 1999). Implementation of similar programs in Missouri may be a way to increase job satisfaction. Some paraprofessionals, although they enjoy their work, feel that they are in “dead end” positions due to lack of opportunities for advancement. Teacher recruitment programs could change this perception by providing interested paraprofessionals with skills for career advancement and the self-esteem to pursue higher career aspirations.

The conceptual underpinning of the United States Department of Education regarding the No Child Left Behind Act is supported by these findings. In order for a paraprofessional to be considered highly qualified for his or her position, he or she must have completed at least 60 hours of college credit and/or earned a passing score on a state assessment test. The duties of paraprofessionals have changed significantly in recent decades, which means that schools need to hold high standards when it comes to hiring processes for paraprofessionals. However, these guidelines from NCLB only apply to schools that receive Title I and other types of federal funding. Therefore, a school district that does not receive such federal funding can be more
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lenient in terms of requirements for paraprofessionals. A paraprofessional who has at least an associate’s degree and is working on or has obtained teacher certification is likely to become dissatisfied with his or her position over time due to his or her knowledge about educational standards and working conditions for teachers. A paraprofessional who does not have an education beyond a high school diploma may not be aware of factors that would allow his or her job to be more satisfying. In other words, the old saying, “ignorance is bliss,” may apply. The U.S. Department of Education encourages school districts to hire paraprofessionals who are more than capable of meeting the needs of students in special education.

The conceptual underpinning that paraprofessionals do not receive adequate professional development is not fully supported by this study. Although Michael Giangreco, Jesse Suter, and Mary Beth Doyle found that paraprofessionals often do not receive proper supervision from cooperating special education teachers, the results of this study indicated that a lack of professional development did not prevent paraprofessionals from remaining with their school districts for the long term. However, results of the survey indicate that most of these paraprofessionals felt that they did not receive enough opportunities to learn more through professional development. Additional studies should be administered to obtain information about specific professional development opportunities that are available to paraprofessionals in various school districts throughout Missouri, and to find out exactly which types of courses and/or trainings are desired by paraprofessionals.

Jennifer Boudreau and Nicholas Twigg predicted that the number of paraprofessionals being hired is going to continue to rise due to increases in numbers of students in need of special education services, and George Giuliani expressed concerns about paraprofessionals receiving low pay for stressful work. Due to the fact that lower salaries do not prevent paraprofessionals in
Missouri from remaining in the profession, the conceptual underpinning of these experts is not supported. However, lower salaries continue to be a problem for paraprofessionals in the state of Missouri. School districts in urban and suburban communities are able to provide paraprofessionals with competitive pay rates and benefits packages. In contrast, a larger number of districts in rural areas are unable to do so, and they often have to lower their qualifications for hiring paraprofessionals in order to be able to fund these positions. Qualified teachers who are unable to obtain teaching positions in urban and suburban areas may be able to gain satisfactory incomes while serving in paraprofessional positions, but those who live in rural areas may be forced to look into other careers and industries for employment. There is a possibility that school budgets are not being planned in ways that correspond with the demand for more paraprofessional positions, and for the trainings that are needed in order to ensure that paraprofessionals can meet the needs of students and supervising teachers. School district administrators need to look into creative ways for funding paraprofessional positions. In some cases, Title I funding may be available, or it may be time to become creative and search for funding through grants and charitable resources.

Overall, there are many well-educated paraprofessionals in Missouri who are satisfied with their training and the support they receive from cooperating teachers and other colleagues. However, this satisfaction slowly decreases as time goes by, especially among those who are educated as teachers. Paraprofessionals who are less educated may seem content with their positions, but this may be due to a lack of awareness of ways in which their positions could be better. As the job duties of paraprofessionals continue to grow, administrators must re-evaluate the needs for training and supervision. Studies should be undertaken to compare and contrast the hiring qualifications, job duties, and salaries of paraprofessionals in Missouri to those in other
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states. Valuable information could also be obtained from Missouri paraprofessionals who have worked in similar positions in other states. As the field of special education continues to grow, there may be more changes in the job duties of paraprofessionals. One possibility is the creation of various job classifications within the category of special education paraprofessionals, with each one having its own set of requirements. A revision of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act to ensure that paraprofessionals receive proper training would be a huge benefit to students, teachers, and paraprofessionals in special education. Budgets are a challenge for any school district, but keeping up with the times is essential, especially in special education. It is crucial that administrators find ways to offer competitive salaries that allow schools to hire and retain highly qualified paraprofessionals. To ensure job satisfaction of paraprofessionals, these educators must be held to the same high regard as teachers.
REFERENCES


Q1. How many years of experience do you have as a paraprofessional in your district?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21-30 years
- 31+ years

Q2. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

- High School Diploma
- Some College
- Certificate Program
- Associate’s Degree
- Bachelor’s Degree
- Some Graduate School
- Master’s Degree or Higher

Q3. Have you obtained teacher certification? (This may be a current or an expired certificate. Check all that apply).

- No, I do not have a teaching certificate.
- I have obtained a teaching certificate in Special Education.
- I have obtained a teaching certificate in a field other than Special Education.
- I am currently working on obtaining a teaching certificate.

Q4. What is your annual salary as a paraprofessional?

- Less than $18,000/year
- $18,000-20,000/year
- $21,000-$25,000/year
- $26,000-$30,000/year
- $31,000-$40,000/year
- Greater than $40,000/year

Q5. Do you work at any extra jobs outside of school during the school year?  (Note: This doesn’t include coaching, tutoring, sporting events, or any other jobs for your school district).

- Yes
- No

Q6. Do you feel that your district provides an adequate amount of training and/or professional development for paraprofessionals?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q7. Do you feel that your cooperating teachers provide necessary constructive criticism and positive feedback to ensure that you are successful in your position?
• All of the time
• Most of the time
• Sometimes
• Not very often
• Never

Q8. Have you ever been employed by another school district, private school, or facility that provides educational services?
• Yes
• No

Q9. Which grade level of students do you currently work with? (Check all that apply).
• Pre-K
• Elementary School
• Middle School
• High School
• Other

Q10. If you have comments about your educational background and/or experience as an educator, or additional information regarding any of the questions in this survey, feel free to post them here: