Evaluation process of paraeducators: perspectives from paraeducators and principals

Lynn Glickman

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations

Recommended Citation
https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations/2946

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
ABSTRACT

EVALUATION PROCESS OF PARAEDUCATORS: PERSPECTIVES FROM PARAEDUCATORS AND PRINCIPALS

Lynn Glickman, Ed.D.
Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations
Northern Illinois University, 2017
Teresa Wasonga, Director

Paraeducators support students in schools throughout the United States by fulfilling duties such as providing instructional reinforcement, assisting with clerical tasks, supervising students, and supporting the mobility and/or hygiene of students with physical disabilities. However, although data show that approximately 91% of schools in the United States employ paraeducators, very little research exists regarding the evaluation of these employees.

The purpose of this study was to investigate paraeducator evaluation through the perceptions of paraeducators and principals who participated in paraeducator evaluation. The topic was considered within the conceptual framework of employee evaluation, or appraisal, a term often used in the larger scope of businesses and organizations as well as within the expectations for evaluating educator performance in the state of Illinois. Employee appraisals help organizations monitor and improve employee performance, identify professional development needs, clarify expectations for employees, and justify employment decisions. Employees benefit from evaluation because by participating in the appraisal process they may experience motivation and job satisfaction and may gain growth opportunities. Thus, this research project intended to address the gap between the importance of paraeducator evaluation and the available information about the appraisal process of this employee group.
I sought to understand paraeducator evaluation by examining individual experiences, and thus the study was conducted using qualitative methods. Six principals and fourteen paraeducators who work in a mid-size suburban elementary school district were interviewed. The following research question guided the study: What is the process of paraeducator evaluation? The following subquestions were also investigated:

1) How do paraeducators perceive their experiences with evaluations in their schools?

2) How do principals perceive their experiences of participating in paraeducator evaluation?

The following themes emerged from the data: Inconsistencies in the Paraeducator Evaluation Process, Feedback with Limited Value, Lack of Clarity Regarding Purpose of Evaluations, Varying Perceptions of Evaluation Conferences, Limited Preparation for Evaluating Paraeducators, and Valuing Paraeducators. The study concludes with recommendations regarding the evaluation process, training of paraeducator evaluation participants, and suggestions for future research.
EVALUATION PROCESS OF PARAEDUCATORS: PERSPECTIVES FROM PARAEDUCATORS AND PRINCIPALS

BY

LYNN GLICKMAN
©2017 Lynn Glickman

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND FOUNDATIONS

Doctoral Director:
Teresa Wasonga
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to the professionals at Northern Illinois University who have contributed their time and expertise to the completion of this dissertation. I thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Teresa Wasonga, who was my first professor at Northern Illinois University, and my last. Dr. Wasonga supplied me with books, questions, new perspectives, and a high bar, and for all of this, I am grateful. I also thank the rest of my doctoral committee for providing valuable feedback as I completed my work: Dr. Carolyn Pluim and Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins. In addition, I am extremely appreciative of the support that I received from Gail Jacky, director of the University Writing Center. Gail was available for all questions and problem solving, and I do not know how I would have completed this work without her help.

I also received support from professionals outside the NIU arena. Specifically, Dr. Shawn Schleizer offered time, patience, and creativity when I needed all of these, and Dr. Aryn Froum provided advice and encouragement throughout my dissertation experience. Someday I hope to support others through the process as Shawn and Aryn supported me.

Many friends and family members suffered through endless stories of writing as I worked, and they were unwaveringly patient and encouraging. Of course, my husband, daughters, and parents heard and lived through the most. I could not have completed this work without their love and support.
DEDICATION

To paraeducators who support students, and to Larry, Eliana, and Sophie, who support me
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF APPENDICES</th>
<th>viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. BACKGROUND/RATIONALE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraeducators in Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Legislation Regarding Paraeducator Evaluation and Supervision</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of Literature Review</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraeducators in General</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Paraeducators</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Employment of Paraeducators</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Paraeducators</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision of Paraeducators</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for Paraeducators</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Concepts</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Paraeducators</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem and Purpose Overview</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and Sampling</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Instrumentation</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School District Documents</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Validity</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RESULTS</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millstone School District 3 Paraeducator Evaluation Procedures</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Subquestion 1</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistencies in the Paraeducator Evaluation Process</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback with Limited Value</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Clarity Regarding Purpose of Evaluations</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Subquestion 1 Overview</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Subquestion 2</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistencies in the Paraeducator Evaluation Process</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varying Perceptions Regarding Evaluation Meetings</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Clarity Regarding Purpose of Evaluations</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Preparation for Evaluating Paraeducators</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Paraeducators</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Subquestion Question 2 Overview</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUTURE RESEARCH</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of Paraeducator Evaluation</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Paraeducators</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Evaluation</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Practice</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Process</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Discussions</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. 2012-2013 CLASSIFIED SUPPORT PERSONNEL EVALUATION</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. 2007 CLASSIFIED PERSONNEL EVALUATION</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. SUPERINTENDENT’S LETTER</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. EXPERIENCE SPREADSHEET</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. JOB DESCRIPTIONS</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND/RATIONALE

Paraeducators in Schools

Paraeducators, also known as paraprofessionals, teachers’ aides, or assistants, support students throughout the American public school systems. Whether they are assigned to work directly with one teacher or support the efforts of many and whether they provide help for individual students or for full classrooms, their job responsibilities are varied. Such responsibilities may include providing instructional reinforcement, collecting data, assisting with clerical tasks, supervising students, implementing behavior management groups, grading assignments and assessments, supporting the mobility and/or hygiene of students with physical disabilities, and providing interpretive services for the families of English Language Learners (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Etscheidt, 2005; French, 2003; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; Moshoyannis, Pickett, & Granick, 1999; Rubin, 1994).

The most recent national data regarding the employment of paraeducators were collected by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) during the 2003-2004 school year. These data showed that 91% of public elementary and secondary schools in the United States employed approximately 634,000 paraeducators (Hampden-Thompson, Diehl, & Kinukawa, 2007). However, although many paraeducators are employed in schools, very little research exists regarding appraisal of these employees. The small amount of available research suggests that although principals, assistant principals, other administrators, or
sometimes supervising teachers are responsible for evaluating or appraising paraeducators (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2013; Bartholomew, 2002; French, 2001, 2003; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002; Moshoyannis, Pickett, & Granick, 1999; Riggs & Mueller, 2001), their performance often goes unevaluated (Mueller, 2002; Riggs & Mueller, 2001) and the performance appraisals that do occur may be brief (Watkinson, 2008).

Employee evaluations help organizations monitor and improve employee performance, identify professional development needs, clarify expectations for employees, and justify employment decisions. Employees benefit from evaluation because by participating in the appraisal process they may experience motivation and job satisfaction and may gain growth opportunities (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). Thus, when supervisors fail to evaluate their paraeducators regularly and with rigor, they miss important opportunities that can support improvement for both the school and the employee.

The gap between the importance of paraeducator evaluation and the available information about the appraisal process of this employee group should be a concern for educational leaders. This research project intended to address that gap.

Research and Legislation Regarding Paraeducator Evaluation and Supervision

Research surrounding the evaluation of teachers is extensive (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Brandt, Thomas, & Burke, 2008; Lyon, 2009; New Teacher Project, 2010), and teacher evaluation has been a topic of great discussion and legislative direction in the state of Illinois over the past seven years. In January 2010, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act, which defined a wide-ranging set of new requirements regarding how teachers are evaluated in Illinois, was passed by the Illinois General Assembly. However, the Illinois law does not apply
to the evaluation of classified staff such as paraeducators, and there is no legal requirement to evaluate the performance of paraeducators in the state. In addition, there is very little literature surrounding the topic of paraeducator evaluation (Bartholomew, 2002; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002). The concept of evaluation of paraeducators seems to be overlooked in the world of educational research, despite the fact that paraeducators impact students through their daily responsibilities. While teachers are primarily accountable for educating students, paraeducators provide services that influence student learning and social/emotional development, and thus, they are important members of the educational team (Giangreco et al., 1999).

Legislation regarding the supervision of paraeducators is only slightly more robust than laws regarding paraeducator evaluation. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was initially introduced in 1975 to provide supports for people with disabilities. While it has been revised many times, the 1997 revision was the first piece of education legislation that specifically mentioned the role paraeducators play in assisting students who receive special education services (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2013), declaring that a state may “allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulations, or written policy… to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997, p. 35).

While IDEA 1997 requires the supervision of paraeducators, the law does not clarify who is responsible for providing such supervision. IDEA also requires states to identify the training needs of all personnel, including paraeducators (Breton, 2010). However, in 1999 Pickett reported that most states had not adequately addressed this issue and that IDEA regulations provide only minimal guidance surrounding the issues of training and supervision. Clarity
regarding who is responsible for supervising paraeducators did not come until 2001, when the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), stipulated that a paraprofessional must work under the supervision of a certified or licensed teacher (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006, 2013; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; French, 2003). The Act does not, however, describe how such supervision should be provided (Chisom, 2002), and even if supervisors do not directly evaluate those who report to them, they typically contribute to such performance appraisal. Thus, this lack of direction surrounding the supervision of paraeducators contributes to the weak body of information regarding the evaluation of this employee group.

What, then, constitutes supervision of educators? Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983) explain that “supervision is a process used by those in schools who have responsibility for one or another aspect of the school’s goals and who depend directly on others to help them achieve these goals” (p. 12). French (2003) is more explicit in her explanation of supervision specifically for paraeducators, as she defines the Seven Executive Functions of Paraeducator Supervision:

1. Orienting paraeducators to the program, school, and students
2. Planning for paraeducators
3. Scheduling for paraeducators
4. Delegating tasks to paraeducators
5. On-the-job training and coaching of paraeducators
6. Monitoring and feedback regarding paraeducator task performance
7. Managing the workplace (communications, problem solving, conflict management) (p. 43)

The sixth function, “monitoring and feedback regarding paraeducator task performance,” speaks to the importance of supervisors providing evaluative feedback to paraeducators. Research indicates teachers are often not appropriately trained in or even informed of their supervisory responsibilities (Aubauer & Morgan, 2006; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Wallace, Shin,
Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Other research points out that while teachers may understand their supervisory duties, they can be reluctant to meet those requirements (French, 1998), especially because supervising adults was not one of their goals when they chose the teaching profession (Wallace et al., 2001). Supervision of paraeducators is sometimes very minimal, if not nonexistent (Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco, Boer, & Edelman, 2002), and in some cases paraeducators report confusion or complete lack of knowledge regarding who is supposed to be supervising them (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006).

Teachers are often the primary supervisors of paraeducators (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006, 2013; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; French, 2003), but principals often are responsible for evaluating paraeducators, sometimes inviting supervising teachers to provide input for the evaluations (French, 2003). However appraisal data are gathered, they are needed to understand the developmental needs of paraeducators and justify the retention and dismissal of paraeducators (Grote, 2002; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007).

Framework

The topic of paraeducator evaluation was considered within the conceptual framework of employee evaluation, or appraisal, a term often used in the larger scope of businesses and organizations, as well as within the expectations for evaluating educator performance in the state of Illinois. Research (Gravina & Siers, 2011; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986) has found that the essence of performance appraisal is work performance measurement.

Appraisals have many purposes. These include monitoring and improving employee performance; understanding employee capabilities; fostering the self-development of employees; identifying the professional development needs of an organization; determining the retention,
promotion, transfer, and compensation of employees; and ensuring employees’ skills are maximized and the performance of employees is aligned to the needs of an organization. Appraisal can clarify the expectations of an organization for the employees and can provide motivation, job satisfaction, improved communication, and growth opportunities for the employee. For these reasons, the employer may benefit from effective performance appraisal, as evaluation can enhance the overall organizational performance and justify employment decisions (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). Appraisal can be both evaluative and developmental. While an organization’s employment decisions such as retention, promotion, transfer, and compensation may be informed by the evaluative functions of appraisal, developmental functions, on the other hand, may focus on performance improvement through coaching, goal setting, and motivating employees (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986). In this research project, purposes served by the evaluation of paraeducators as well as evaluation benefits for the employees and employers are considered.

Performance review typically includes an appraisal interview, which can serve a variety of purposes, including discussing ratings, engaging in problem solving, setting goals, and explaining administrative decisions (Dickinson, 1993). Research suggests a supervisor’s skill in conducting this meeting greatly influences whether the appraisal program is effective in motivating improved performance (Meyer & Walker, 1961; Prowse & Prowse, 2009). The evaluator should give specific examples of proficiencies and deficiencies, being careful to emphasize employee strengths and then focus on problem solving when discussing concerns. According to Ondrack and Oliver (1986), the appraisal should consider performance rather than personality. The supervisor should invite the employee to ask questions and offer his/her own assessment of performance, and then the supervisor should be prepared to alter the appraisal
based on the data offered by the employee. A good appraisal system emphasizes future improvement in performance through goal setting. Finally, follow-up is advised, as the evaluator should be available for coaching after the appraisal and should carefully monitor the employee for evidence of improvement (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986).

Fairness in appraisal depends on a variety of factors. The fairest appraisals come from evaluators who are honest, direct, and specific with feedback. Observing an employee frequently helps an evaluator provide a fairer appraisal because such observations allow the evaluator to consider multiple samples of job performance (Ilgen, 1983; McKirchy, 1998; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Prowse & Prowse, 2009). Supervisors should observe a wide range of behaviors relevant to the goals of the job to evaluate employee performance (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995).

However, a supervisor’s desire to be popular with employees and a general tendency in individuals to avoid conflict may cause the supervisor to dislike the tasks connected to evaluating employees (Sims, 1998). Some managers avoid appraisal altogether because they are uncertain of criteria and procedures or are fearful of causing an unpleasant reaction from the employee or of being in the position to manipulate others’ lives. They may believe the process is irrelevant. A manager may also avoid appraisal simply due to his or her inability to organize time (Kikoski, 1998; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986).

Appropriate training can increase evaluator confidence and support managers through the process of writing appraisals grounded in fair evaluation practices and conducting effective appraisal interviews (Roberts, 1998; Sims, 1998). It is noted, however, that evaluators are usually unaware they are making rating errors, and thus, such errors are difficult to correct (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986). The extent to which paraeducator evaluators are trained in appraisal skills was examined through this study.
Research suggests when an employee actively participates in the appraisal process, the employee is more likely to perceive the process was fair, is more likely to express satisfaction with the process, and may be more likely to improve performance (Cawley, Keeping, & Levy, 1998). Employees may participate in the appraisal process by helping to develop performance standards or the rating form, participating in self-appraisal, and/or setting goals (Roberts, 2003).

Research also suggests setting goals when receiving feedback has a positive effect on an employee’s motivation to improve performance and an employee’s perception of the overall success of the appraisal process (Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979). In addition, collaboration between the supervisor and employee around the concept of goal setting may result in more positive performance (Meyer, Kay, & French, 1965). The extent to which paraeducators participate in their own evaluation processes was also studied through this research project.

In Illinois, state law (Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010) sets forth teacher evaluation requirements that are supported by existing appraisal research (Ilgen, 1983; McKirchy, 1998; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Prowse & Prowse, 2009). For example, evaluators are required to observe teacher performance on multiple occasions. Included in the teacher evaluation process are a variety of meetings that are designed to support the professional development of the educator: pre-observation meetings, post-observation meetings, and final evaluation meetings. In addition, evaluators are required to attend training sessions (Roberts, 1998; Sims, 1998) prior to appraising the performance of teachers. Finally, teachers must set goals as part of the evaluation process, a practice supported by general employee appraisal research (Meyer, Kay, & French, 1965; Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979; Roberts, 2003).
The research surrounding employee appraisal was not pulled directly from the field of paraeducator employment; however, the concepts can be generalized to the evaluation of paraeducators and, thus, serve as a framework for this study. Therefore, paraeducator evaluation was considered within a framework that included the purpose for evaluation, performance observation, meetings and goal setting designed to support professional growth and evaluator training as described in general employee appraisal literature and in the requirements of teacher evaluation in Illinois.

Statement of the Problem

The dependence on paraeducators in school systems is well established (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Etscheidt, 2005; French, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1997; Moshoyannis, Pickett, & Granick, 1999; Rubin, 1994). The value of performance appraisal is also well established, and uses for appraisal in businesses and other organizations have been documented in research literature (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). Aside from the few articles previously identified, there is very little information available about the evaluation of paraeducators (Bartholomew, 2002; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002).

The topic of teacher appraisal or evaluation (the term more commonly used in educational organizations) has been researched extensively (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Brandt et al., 2008; Lyon, 2009; New Teacher Project, 2010). In great contrast, the topic of paraeducator evaluation has been left largely unexplored, despite the fact that in 2003-2004, 91% of public elementary and high schools in the United States reported employing paraeducators (Bartholomew, 2002; Hampden-Thompson et al., 2007; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002). Paraeducators just like teachers and school administrators provide valuable service to schools,
and their status including performance and professional growth deserves to be explored and understood.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate paraeducator evaluation through the perceptions of paraeducators and principals who participated in paraeducator evaluation in a mid-sized elementary school district in a suburb of a large city. I sought to understand this topic by examining individual experiences, thus the study was conducted using qualitative methods.

Significance of the Study

The last time that paraeducator employment data were collected, 91% of public elementary and secondary schools in the United States employed approximately 634,000 paraeducators (Hampden-Thompson, Diehl, & Kinukawa, 2007). The importance of employee evaluation is well-established (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007), yet very little research exists regarding how paraeducators are evaluated (Bartholomew, 2002; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002). This study addressed the gap between the importance of paraeducator evaluation and the information available about the appraisal process for this employee group.

Research Questions

This study investigated the connection among the concepts and recommendations identified in the literature regarding performance appraisal and the paraeducators’ and their evaluators’ experiences in participating in the paraeducator evaluation. The following research
question guided the study: What is the process of paraeducator evaluation? The following subquestions were also investigated:

1. How do paraeducators perceive their experiences with evaluations in their schools?
2. How do principals perceive their experiences of participating in paraeducator evaluation?

Limitations

When designing this study, I was aware a potential limitation might be the willingness of paraeducators to participate in interviews due to fear of breaches in confidentiality. Another possible limitation of the study, due to the same concern on the part of the paraeducators, was that the paraeducators might agree to participate but then be unwilling to share their thoughts about their experiences with openness and full honesty.

Assumptions

The following assumptions underlie this study:

● School districts have documented processes for evaluating paraeducators, and those processes are standardized from school to school in the same district.
● Paraeducators are evaluated by their principals or assistant principals.
● Paraeducators are supervised by teachers and/or principals/assistant principals.
Definition of Terms

**Evaluation**: A conceptual definition of evaluation comes from a constructed definition of appraisal, as the concept is more commonly called outside the world of education. Appraisal, then, is work performance measurement (Gravina & Siers, 2011; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986). The operational definition of evaluation, or appraisal, involves formal written assessment of performance and an appraisal interview and often includes pre-arranged observation of the paraeducator. This process may occur yearly or bi-yearly and may be included within a collective bargaining agreement if such a document is in place.

**Paraeducator**: The operational definition of paraeducator is borrowed from the National Education Association (NEA). According to the NEA (2005), a paraeducator is “a school employee who works alongside and under the supervision of a licensed or certificated educator to support and assist in providing instructional and other services to children, youth, and their families” (p. 5). Paraeducators may be responsible for supporting students at any age level. They may provide specific academic interventions under the supervision of a teacher or they may act as assistants in the classroom. Many paraeducators work with students who receive special education services. Most paraeducators have job responsibilities related to academic achievement and school safety.

**Principal**: In this study, the operational definition of principal means the principal, an assistant principal, or any other administrator of a school who is responsible for the evaluation of paraeducators.

**Supervision**: The conceptual definition of supervision is “a process used by those in schools who have responsibility for one or another aspect of the school’s goals and who depend directly on
others to help them achieve these goals” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983, p. 12). Operationally, the supervision of paraeducators is sometimes assigned to the teachers with whom paraeducators work most closely. In some schools, teachers have no supervisory responsibilities and the supervision is left solely to the principal. Either way, the building administrator has the ultimate supervisory responsibility for all staff in the school.

Summary

This study addressed the gap between the importance of paraeducator evaluation and the information available about the appraisal process for this employee group. The purpose of this study was to investigate paraeducator evaluation through the perceptions of the paraeducators and principals.

The following chapters will include a review of existing information regarding these topics, an explanation of the methodology used for this study, the research findings, and the discussion and implications.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background of Literature Review

Very little literature is available about the topic of paraeducator evaluation (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002). In fact, published information related in any way to the employment of paraeducators is lacking in the established knowledge around schools and schooling (Bartholomew, 2002). For example, the complexities of the work of paraeducators and how their jobs have evolved over time is not well defined in the literature (Conley, Gould, & Levine, 2010) nor is paraeducator supervision or training (Bartholomew, 2002). And even though paraeducators are found at most schools, the effect of paraeducators on student achievement is not well understood or documented (Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001).

The following topics were researched in preparation for this study: paraeducators, paraeducator supervision, paraeducator training, paraeducator evaluation. It is also noted that while searching for information, I searched all of the common names for paraeducator. These names include paraprofessional, teacher assistant, and teacher aide, along with paraeducator. In addition to these topics that surround the work of the paraeducator, I also extensively studied the concept of employee appraisal.
Paraeducators in General

According to the NEA (2005), the term “paraeducator” refers to a school employee “who works alongside and under the supervision of a licensed or certified educator to support and assist in providing instructional and other services to children, youth, and their families” (p. 5). In *The Paraeducator Handbook*, the NEA lists over 30 different names for this position, which include the commonly used teacher aide, instructional assistant, teaching assistant, and paraprofessional. As the NEA has adopted the term “paraeducator” for the position, that term will be used throughout this research project. The federal government also provides a definition for the synonymous term “paraprofessional”. The federal No Child Left Behind Act, now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), defines a paraprofessional as “an individual who is employed in a preschool, elementary school or secondary school under the supervision of a certified or licensed teacher, including individuals employed in language instruction educational programs, special education, or migrant education” (Public Law 107-110, 2002).

Role of Paraeducators

As noted in Chapter 1, paraeducators take on many roles in schools. Paraeducator roles are organized among specific job categories. For example, some paraeducators work exclusively with students who require special education support. Others are bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) paraeducators, and thus, their job responsibilities revolve around supporting the learning needs of English language learners (ELLs). Some paraeducators are hired exclusively to work in compensatory education programs or to provide instructional interventions for students who need additional support, such as those provided under Title 1, a government program that
designates funds to improve the quality of education in school districts serving populations with a low socio-economic base (Conley, Gould, & Levine, 2010; Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001). Early childhood programs also use paraeducators to provide supervision and instructional assistance (Bartholomew, 2002; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

The data regarding how paraeducators spend the preponderance of time vary. In a 2002 study, Giangreco et al. collected data from 215 school personnel in four schools in Vermont to gather quantitative information about paraeducator roles and to identify themes surrounding the evolution of paraeducator services in those schools. Classroom teachers, special education teachers, and paraeducators agreed instruction was the most common responsibility assigned to paraeducators, accounting for an average of almost 68% of the responses. These results contrast greatly with data collected in Tennessee schools 12 years earlier. Tennessee’s Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) was funded by the Tennessee state legislature and was a large-scale, longitudinal experimental investigation of the effects of class size and paraeducators on academic performance. As part of that study, approximately 400 paraeducators recorded their daily activities in logs. These data were re-examined in 2001, and researchers found that paraeducators reported the largest percentage of their day (40%) was spent on administrative tasks such as paperwork, grading assignments, and administering tests. Instructional tasks such as providing whole group, small group, or individual lessons ranked only second, at 25-30% of their day, and the remaining 20-25% of the time was devoted to non-instructional interactions with students, most of which occurred during supervisory duties (Gerber et al., 2001). Thus, the data showed 400 paraeducators in Tennessee spending only 25-30% of their time in instructional duties in 1990, and yet in 2002, 68% of paraeducators and teachers in the four schools in
Vermont reported most of paraeducator time was spent on instructional responsibilities. Whether the variance in data is due to regional or state differences, a change over time regarding how paraeducators are used, or accounted for by some other factor is unknown.

History of Employment of Paraeducators

Understanding the history of paraeducator employment in the United States provides perspective regarding this employee group’s growing importance in the school systems. As noted below, untrained paraeducators were initially hired to provide physical or behavioral support to students with significant disabilities and then in later years began to perform clerical duties for teachers. In today’s classrooms, paraeducators provide instructional reinforcement, collect data, implement behavior plans, grade assignments, and interpret for the families of ELLs (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Etscheidt, 2005; French, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1997; Moshoyannis et al., 1999; Rubin, 1994). These employees have significant responsibilities in the daily functioning of schools, so school effectiveness can be greatly enhanced by paraeducator evaluation that follows the recommendations of employee appraisal research to ensure employees’ skills are maximized and the performance of employees is aligned to the needs of an organization (Jefferson, 2010).

Paraeducators were first introduced into the American school system after World War II. At that time, an increasing number of children with significant disabilities began to survive the birth process. Many of these children were excluded from public schools, which resulted in private schools providing educational services to children with special needs. These schools were often staffed by adults who did not hold educator licenses and who were not trained to provide instructional support to children. Government-operated programs and private services supported by public school tax dollars then emerged to enhance educational opportunities for children with
disabilities. Twenty-five or more students with neurologic, intellectual, social, physical, and/or behavioral difficulties might be assigned to one teacher and five paraeducators in these programs (Brown, Farrington, Knight, Ross, & Ziegler, 1999).

The 1950s brought a substantial shortage of teachers. To maximize teachers’ instructional time, paraeducators were hired to lessen teachers’ administrative and clerical burdens (Chisom, 2002; Gerber et al., 2001; Jones & Bender, 1993). One of the first organized projects that studied the employment of paraeducators was the 1953 Ford Foundation program in the Bay City, Michigan, schools. Observational data collected on eight classrooms that were assigned paraeducators to work under the supervision of teachers and control classrooms indicated teachers with paraeducators spent 89% less time grading papers, 36% less time disciplining students, 25% less time writing reports, and 83% less time monitoring students who were working independently. Teachers with paraeducators were also able to spend twice the amount of time planning lessons and 40% more time supervising students. Parents were surveyed, and 83% reported their children learned more in classrooms with paraeducators. It is noted, however, that this academic advantage was only perceived, as test score data did not display a significant difference among the groups (Gerber et al., 2001; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

An important legislative act in the 1960s helped to define the role of some paraeducators. Title 1 of PL 89-10, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, designated $75 million to improve the quality of education in school districts serving populations with a low socio-economic base. Such funding was often used to hire instructional paraeducators to assist teachers, and it was common for community members to fill these roles. These untrained staff members were often used as clerical assistants, completing tasks such as making copies, hanging papers on bulletin boards, and marking student papers. Over time some paraeducators began
performing more instructional tasks, usually directly related to providing reading support, including reading to children or listening to children read aloud. However, the majority of the paraeducators’ time continued to be spent on administrative responsibilities. Data collected in 1967 by the National Education Association (NEA) indicated 6% of teachers used their paraeducators for reading activities and 56% of teachers assigned only administrative or clerical tasks to their paraeducators (Conley et al., 2010; Gerber et al., 2001). How these paraeducators were evaluated, or even if they were evaluated, is a topic left unexplored in the literature.

Two laws in the late 1960s and mid-1970s increased the demand for paraeducators and expanded the range of duties required of them. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was the first official federal acknowledgement of the needs of students with limited English proficiency. This law recognized that such students have specific educational needs and, in the interest of equal educational opportunity, bilingual programs created to meet those needs should be federally funded (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). To address the shortage of bilingual teachers, schools hired paraeducators who spoke two languages to support the needs of bilingual students (Gerber et al., 2001). The second law was established in 1975 when the federal government passed the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). This law required public schools to provide a free and appropriate education for all children and youth, and thus many more students with disabilities were served through public schooling. School administrators hired paraeducators while attempting to provide individualized instruction for students with disabilities. Although some paraeducators provided instructional support for students with learning disabilities, the primary role for the paraeducators was to support the functional needs of the students such as eating, toileting, and mobility. School personnel assumed students with significant disabilities did not have the capacity to learn much; therefore, untrained adults were
hired to help them with functional skills. In addition, some paraeducators provided instructional assistance for students with learning disabilities. Reauthorized in 1990, EAHCA is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Brown et al., 1999; Conley et al., 2010; Gerber et al., 2001; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

An assumption that White, middle-class teachers and principals could not meet the needs of ethnic, language minority, and economically and educationally disadvantaged students also led to an increase in the use of paraeducators in the 1970s. Schools began recruiting paraeducators from local neighborhoods because they were presumed to understand the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the community. School personnel felt these individuals would be familiar in the community and could facilitate improved communication among school personnel, students, and parents (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

As more paraeducators became employed in school systems, policy makers became increasingly aware of the social and economic barriers that prevented workers from economically disadvantaged and ethnic and language minority backgrounds from enhancing their professional opportunities. Therefore, in 1970 the U.S. Office of Education established the Career Opportunities Program (COP), which supported more than 20,000 people in career advancement programs. The mission of COP was to provide educational opportunities for community residents who were working as paraeducators in low-income areas. COP existed as an alternative route to teacher certification for seven years and supported participants by scheduling required coursework at night, providing financial assistance, tutoring candidates for high school equivalency tests, and conducting classes off campus near participants’ homes (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).
While such flexible degree programs were being designed to recruit and support paraeducators in the 1970s, a few states such as Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, and Vermont began to create credentialing procedures for these employees. Other states began to establish administrative guidelines that defined appropriate responsibilities for paraeducators (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). The existence of flexible degree programs, new credentialing procedures, and administrative guidelines regarding paraeducator responsibilities all signaled an awakening to the importance of this employee group, and yet the concept of paraeducator evaluation remained unstudied in the 1970s.

Paraeducators continued to be utilized in the mid-1980s when educators and parents began focusing on including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The need for the support of paraeducators grew as schools met the mandates in the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986 that require public schools to provide services to children ages three through five who have disabilities and chronic health needs that place them at risk (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Paraeducators were utilized to provide the students with the support needed to be successful within general education settings. Indeed, as inclusion has grown to become the standard for special education, instructional paraeducators have been employed to provide increasing amounts of support (Brown et al., 1999; Conley et al., 2010). Financial federal support declined for all educational programs in the 1980s, and this change led to waning interest nationally for developing standards or professional growth opportunities for paraeducators (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

Educators began questioning the value of extensive use of paraeducators in the late 1990s, as some educational professionals concluded providing support through paraeducators was counterproductive. These professionals questioned the practice of assigning a paraeducator
to a child with special needs, believing this practice excused teachers from shouldering the responsibility of educating the child. In addition, educators saw the bond formed between the child and paraeducator could cause the child to become overly reliant on the adult (Brown et al., 1999).

Nonetheless, there are indications that the use of paraeducators continued to grow through the 1990s. In 2002, Giangreco et al. reviewed quantitative and qualitative data gathered in 1998 and 1999 from 215 school personnel in four schools in a K-12 school system in Vermont. Principals in each of the four schools referred to a steady increase in the number of paraeducators who had been hired in the past few years, and data compiled by the business manager indicated an increase from 219 hours of paraeducator service per day in 1994 to 401 hours of paraeducator service per day in 1999. This change over time represented an 83% increase of paraeducator service.

In 1997, Pickett and Gerlach summarized factors that caused growth in the use of paraeducators. They noted such factors as a response to IDEA and Title 1, a growing need for occupational and physical therapy and speech-language pathology services for children, an increase in students who came from ethnic and language minority backgrounds, ongoing shortages of teachers and related-services personnel such as speech-language pathologists, and expanding roles of paraeducators in the educational setting. These researchers noted that while paraeducators were still required to perform clerical tasks and supervise students, they were also expected to provide instructional services. Thus, under the direction of teachers and other licensed school professionals, paraeducators were often expected to instruct individuals and small groups of students, administer standardized tests, and document student behavior and
performance. Paraeducators also helped speech-language pathologists and occupational and physical therapists implement therapy treatment plans.

In 2007, the National Center for Education Statistics published statistics about the employment of paraeducators (Hampden-Thompson et al.). These statistics were collected in the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and are the most recent data from a large-scope national survey. Analysis in 2003-2004 shows 91% of public elementary and secondary schools in the United States employed instructional paraeducators, defined as special education, Title 1, ESL/bilingual, library/media center, and other instructional paraeducators, and 634,000 paraeducators nationwide provided instructional support. Seventy-five percent of these paraeducators were employed full time, and just under half (312,000) were employed as special education paraprofessionals. The level of employment of paraeducators varied by type of school. While 91% of traditional public schools reported employing instructional paraeducators, only 74% of charter schools reported employing such support personnel. Furthermore, a higher percentage of elementary/middle schools (94%) reported having instructional paraeducators than high schools (82%). Student enrollment also affected results: 94% of schools with more than 300 students reported employing instructional paraeducators, whereas only 82% of schools with fewer than 300 students reported having these employees. Also, schools that used instructional paraeducators reported having on average more special education paraeducators (five) than other instructional (four), Title 1 (three), ESL/bilingual (two), and library/media center (one) paraeducators (Hampden-Thomson et al., 2007).

The high percentage of paraeducators used to support students receiving special education services is tightly linked to the growth of this specific population. Ashbaker and
Morgan (2013) reviewed this growth, stating thirty years ago more than a million school-aged children did not receive any educational services at all due to their disabilities, and at that time, only one fifth of the students who received services were educated in regular public schools. However, currently there are more than six million children with disabilities receiving special education services, and almost all of them are educated in regular public schools. Although data show that the majority of elementary and secondary schools in the United States (91%) employ paraeducators, very little research exists to explain how this vast employee group is evaluated.

Value of Paraeducators

Schools employ paraeducators for a wide variety of reasons. Schools educate students of wide cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and ability diversity, and these complex student populations can be served by employing paraeducators so instruction can be differentiated to meet students’ needs (French, 2003). Paraeducators can provide instructional support in a cost-effective manner as they are generally paid approximately a third of a teacher’s salary (French, 2003). A strong connection between the school and the community can be made by paraeducators, particularly when they are providing bilingual support for students and families (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; French, 2003, Giangreco et al., 1997; Moshoynannis et al., 1999; Rubin, 1994). Paraeducators can work with small groups or individual students with disabilities so children can be educated in the least restrictive environment, often the general education classroom (Etscheidt, 2005; French, 2003, Moshoynannis et al., 1999). Paraeducators can provide for students’ health needs under the supervision of a school nurse by dispensing oral medication and performing tracheotomy tube suctioning and clean intermittent catheterization, and they can also fulfill hygiene needs such as diapering or toileting (Etscheidt, 2005; French, 2003;
Moshoyannis et al., 1999). Speech and language therapy can be provided by paraeducators at a low cost under the supervision of a speech and language therapist (French, 2003). Some schools hire paraeducators to reduce teacher-student ratios in classrooms or to provide instructional reinforcement (French, 2003; Moshoyannis et al., 1999). In addition, paraeducators may be hired simply due to a shortage of qualified teachers for positions (French, 2003).

Studies on educators’ perceptions of the work of paraeducators suggest teachers and principals are supportive of the use of paraeducators in special education classes (Case, 1986; Frank et al., 1988). For example, in 1988, Frank et al. randomly sampled 385 Iowa teachers who utilized paraeducators in their classrooms. In a meta-analysis of utilization of paraeducators in special education, Jones and Bender (1993) state that this survey reveals teachers were satisfied with the performance of the paraeducators. Jones and Bender also discuss a study completed by Case (1986) in which paraeducators, principals, and teachers who worked with paraeducators in special education classes were interviewed and were supportive of the use of paraeducators. Eighty-eight percent of the teachers indicated their programs were more effective due to the work of paraeducators, 70% of the interviewed teachers reported they believed students experienced more academic gains than would have been possible without the support of paraeducators, and 91% percent of the teachers indicated they had more time to respond to individual students due to the presence of paraeducators. In addition, 98% of the interviewed paraeducators indicated a belief that their presence in the classroom allowed teachers to respond to the individual needs of the students. Jones and Bender state this study was one of the few research projects to solicit the views of administrators on paraeducator efficacy, and the data from that study indicated 87% of the interviewed administrators were supportive of the
utilization of paraeducators in special education classes for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

It is important to note, however, that the above-mentioned positive perceptions of the work of paraeducators are not based on student outcome data. In fact, such data are barely represented in research regarding the work of paraeducators. In addition, the literature lacks a strong conceptual or theoretical rationale for using paraeducators in schools (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Jones & Bender, 1993). In their 1993 meta-analysis, Jones and Bender summarized studies intended to consider the impact of paraeducators on student achievement. The highlighted studies showed a range of results, with some research projects pointing to enhanced student achievement (Frelow et al., 1974; Guess et al., 1971; Schortinghuis & Frohman, 1974), while others showed no difference in student achievement outcomes between groups of students taught by paraeducators and students educated only by teachers (Dunn & Smith, 1965; Manning, 1979). None of the studies reported student performance deteriorated when students worked with paraeducators. However, Jones and Bender found design flaws in every study, including a focus on the wrong questions and lack of random assignment, and they concluded at that time there were no existing experimental studies relative to student outcomes to substantiate the use of paraeducators.

French (2003) examined research that indicates paraeducators who have specific training in the delivery of services and instruction are effective, stating in 23 studies, the presence of trained and monitored paraeducators resulted in twice as much student learning when compared to teaching without the support of paraeducators. French also stated these studies have shown well-trained paraeducators increase the promotion rates, attendance rates, and standardized test scores of students and that student reading achievement is accelerated by one-to-one tutoring
programs delivered by paraeducators. French noted other studies indicate paraeducator support in general education classrooms improves the behavior of students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) when combined with social skills training. In contrast, the 2001 Gerber et al. review of Tennessee’s 1990 Project STAR showed no significant differences on student achievement between classes with and without paraeducators.

The quality of paraeducators hired in schools is discussed in the literature, as Giangreco et al. (2002) interviewed school personnel and found principals and teachers were proud of the talented paraeducators they had been able to hire. Teachers used positive phrases such as “dedicated,” “energetic,” “instinctive,” and “skilled” to describe the paraeducators with whom they worked (p. 56). Some principals, however, stated, with concern, that over time the pool of candidates had become less qualified and, thus, they were having difficulty finding people with experience and at least two years of college education to work in these positions. When asked the required qualities in a new paraeducator, one administrator answered with sarcasm, “Do they have a pulse? Are they breathing?” (p.57).

The literature also provides examples of paraeducators expressing feelings of being underappreciated, undercompensated, and unprepared for the work (Giangreco & Broer, 2003). One paraeducator stated, “In our district the paraprofessionals have been told that anyone off the street can do the job. No one has ever taken the time to actually tell or explain what is expected or do any type of orientation” (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001, p. 528).

In 2001, Riggs and Mueller undertook a qualitative/quantitative study of the employment and utilization of paraeducators. When interviewed, many of the paraeducators reported frustrations with professional relationships that they felt were not characterized by mutual respect:
The rewards to be had in doing this are from the kids. In the school where I work, paras are still thought of as housewives with part time jobs... We never know what is going on, but are expected to implement decisions that we are never a part of. As far as the pay goes, there is no differential for education or job performance. If you are one of the capable paras, you are asked to do more and more classroom teaching without any additional pay. If you love the kids and are hooked on the learning process, the administration gets an extra teacher in the bargain. Recognition is pretty much lacking. If it were not for the parents and their children, paras would go pretty much unnoticed. (Riggs & Mueller, 2001, pp. 58-59)

Indeed, the work of paraeducators is largely unnoticed by the general public, and it is uncommon for their work to be heralded in books or articles on teaching or mainstream literature on educational practice (French, 2003). Fox (2003), Giangreco et al. (1999) and Giangreco and Doyle (2002), however, make some recommendations regarding how educators can show appreciation and respect for paraeducators. For example, paraeducators should be considered members of the educational teams for the students with whom they work (Fox, 2003). They should receive orientation information on hire and should receive continuous training targeted to support their work (Giangreco et al., 1999; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Also, at the beginning of the school year, the classroom teacher should welcome the paraeducator by creating a space for his/her belongings in the classroom and placing his/her name on the classroom door with the teacher’s name (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). The teacher should introduce the paraeducator to the students using the same level of formal address utilized for other adults in the school and should model for the students that the teacher and the paraeducator are a team (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Finally, the teacher should clarify the paraeducator’s role on the classroom team, including his/her active participation in team meetings (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). This literature does not, however, comment on the importance of paraeducator evaluation, even though employee appraisal research suggests appraisal can provide job satisfaction and motivation to improve performance (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986). To address this gap, the current
study examined the paraeducator evaluation process in a targeted district from the paraeducators’ and principals’ perspectives.

**Supervision of Paraeducators**

Although very little research exists regarding paraeducator evaluation, there is a body of literature surrounding the topic of paraeducator supervision. Since supervision includes monitoring and providing feedback to employees (French, 2003) and providing feedback is tightly linked to evaluation, a review of the paraeducator supervision literature is included in this study.

The research literature identifies methods for supervising paraeducators and examines the consistency and quality of the supervision that they receive (Ashbaker & Minney, 2005; Ashbaker & Morgan, 2005, 2013; Breton, 2010; Chisom, 2002; Conley et al., 2010; Etscheidt, 2005; French, 2003; Giangreco et al., 2002). Supervision is defined here as “a process used by those in schools who have responsibility for one or another aspect of the school’s goals and who depend directly upon others to help them achieve these goals” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983, p. 12). Operationally, this means that paraeducators depend on others, usually teachers, to help them achieve the goals of the school. French (2003) is specific about the supervisory needs of paraeducators through recommending the Seven Executive Functions of Paraeducator Supervision:

1. Orienting paraeducators to the program, school, and students
2. Planning for paraeducators
3. Scheduling for paraeducators
4. Delegating tasks to paraeducators
5. On-the-job training and coaching of paraeducators
6. Monitoring and feedback regarding paraeducator task performance
7. Managing the workplace (communications, problem solving, conflict management) (p. 43)

The sixth function notes the importance of supervisors providing feedback to paraeducators; however, this does not mean that teachers evaluate, or are prepared to evaluate, the paraeducators, as appraisal responsibilities are typically assigned to principals (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002). Instead teachers who are assigned as supervisors are typically responsible for orienting paraeducators to the school and their duties and providing training to make the best possible use of the paraeducators’ time and skills (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006). In fact, teachers are legally required to provide supervision to paraeducators, as the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires paraeducators to work under the supervision of a certified or licensed teacher. In addition, the reauthorization of IDEA 2004 requires paraeducators to be appropriately supervised, but how they are supervised is left up to the states (Breton, 2010; Chisom, 2002).

However, although ESSA requires paraeducators to work under the supervision of a teacher and IDEA states paraeducators must be adequately supervised, there is no legal definition regarding what constitutes adequate supervision (Ashbaker & Minney, 2005). Title 1 non-regulatory guidance provides the following clarification:

A paraprofessional works under the direct supervision of a teacher if (1) the teacher prepares the lessons and plans the instructional support activities the paraprofessional carries out, and evaluates the achievement of the students with whom the paraprofessional is working, and (2) the paraprofessional works in close and frequent proximity with the teacher. (U.S. Department of Education 2004, p. 10)

This non-binding guidance does not specify what direct supervision entails (Chisom, 2002).

According to Ashbaker and Morgan (2013), “By any standard, this appears to be a scant definition of the supervising teacher’s role in planning the paraprofessional’s work, evaluating
the paraprofessional’s students with no mention of evaluating the paraprofessional and keeping the paraprofessional close at hand” (p. 17). This lack of clarity has led to inconsistency regarding the supervision of paraeducators.

Supervision is sometimes very minimal or nonexistent (Breton, 2010; Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco et al., 2002). Breton’s study in Maine indicated such a lack of supervision. Over 250 paraeducators were asked how often they received consultation from the special education teacher regarding direct student instruction. Approximately 29% reported daily consultation, and 32% reported weekly consultation. Approximately 20% of the paraeducators reported only bimonthly, monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually consultation, and almost 20% stated they received such consultation either only annually or never (Breton, 2010).

According to Conley et al. (2010), the extent to which a paraeducator might experience supervision can vary greatly based on the specific work assignment. For example, a paraeducator working in a special education resource classroom might work under the regular direct supervision of a special education teacher who is present in the classroom at all times, while a paraeducator who works in a general education classroom to more fully include a student with special needs might experience less supervision while making his or her own decisions regarding how to modify curriculum and facilitate social interaction. Yet other paraeducators may be responsible for delivering alternate curriculum to students while working under the close supervision of a teacher (Conley et al., 2010). Since teachers often closely oversee the work of paraeducators, they may have regular opportunities to observe and assess the performance of paraeducators, and yet they do not usually have the responsibility of evaluating paraeducators (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002).
The extent to which a paraeducator experiences supervision may also be based on the supervisor’s level of preparation to supervise. Research (Morrissette, Morrissette & Julien, 2002; Moshoyannis et al., 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Wallace et al., 2001) indicates teachers are often not appropriately trained to effectively supervise paraeducators or may not even be informed of their supervisory responsibilities, and most teacher education programs do not prepare either special education or general education teachers to supervise paraeducators.

A 1999 survey of teachers in New York City conducted by the Paraprofessional Academy showed a very low percentage of teachers receiving any kind of training regarding the supervision of paraeducators (Moshoyannis et al., 1999). Fifteen percent reported receiving training to provide on-the-job coaching, 20% reported receiving training on how to integrate paraeducators into a team, but only 10% received training specific to supervising and monitoring paraeducators. French’s subsequent 2001 survey of nearly 450 special education teachers in Colorado gleaned similar results. Dependent on when they received their qualification, between 85 and 90% of the teachers who supervised paraeducators stated that real-life experience served as their primary source of knowledge regarding supervising paraeducators rather than learning through in-service training, college courses, or help from principals.

Because teachers are so poorly prepared to supervise paraeducators, some literature (Giangreco et al., 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997) recommends that school districts take over the responsibility of providing such supervisory training for teachers. Wallace et al.’s (2001) study identified competencies needed by teachers to supervise the work of paraeducators. The results showed principals, teachers, and paraeducators believed the following are all important competencies for teachers who supervise paraeducators: communication, planning and scheduling, instructional support, modeling, public relations, training, and management of
paraeducators. Such training allows teachers to plan instructional activities, establish priorities, clarify expectations, delegate responsibilities, provide necessary training for paraeducators, create a supportive work environment, and, in some cases, evaluate paraeducator performance.

Ashbaker and Morgan (2006) suggest sometimes supervision responsibilities are also overlooked when paraeducators are hired at the school-district level. This may be the case for bilingual/ESL paraeducators, as in these situations paraeducators may receive their assignments from a supervisor at the district office and may work with students at several schools. Thus, they may not work closely with any licensed personnel at the school level and may receive minimal supervision and/or evaluation.

Other research points out that teachers are sometimes reluctant to meet their supervisory responsibilities even when they are aware of and understand those duties (French, 2001). Teachers note supervising adults was not one of their goals when they chose the teaching profession (Wallace et al., 2001). Thus, teachers’ lack of knowledge about their supervisory responsibilities, combined with their reluctance to supervise paraeducators, leads to confusion for paraeducators, who may not be aware of who is supposed to be supervising them (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2013).

Providing feedback is an important part of supervision; however, this is an area where teachers are sometimes the most uncomfortable, as they fear feedback is considered criticism (Ashbaker & Minney, 2005). Ashbaker and Minney (2005) offer the following suggestions regarding useful methods of providing feedback to paraeducators:

- The teacher should focus on the positive aspects of performance.
- When sharing performance concerns, the teacher should be clear about why a change in performance is required.
● Feedback should be focused on the practice, not personal attributes.
● The teacher should encourage the paraeducator to self-assess.
● The teacher should use modeling to encourage a change in practice.
● Terms and techniques should be carefully explained and taught as needed.

Teachers typically have the primary responsibility for supervising paraeducators, and providing feedback is an important part of supervision (French, 2003). In some cases, teachers are also responsible for evaluating paraeducators (French, 2001; Moshoyannis et al., 1999); however, usually that responsibility is given to principals (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002) despite the teachers’ regular opportunities to observe the work of paraeducators and provide them with feedback.

Training for Paraeducators

A critical aspect of supervision, and eventually evaluation, for paraeducators is training on the specific skills or knowledge a paraeducator needs to be more effective (Ashbaker & Minney, 2005). According to Morrissette et al. (2002), training should be similar to the teacher education process and should involve introducing paraeducators to curriculum design and pedagogical and assessment skills. Training is mandated by the reauthorization of IDEA 2004, which requires that states ensure all personnel who provide special education services are adequately trained so they possess the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Currently, how this mandate is met is left to the discretion of individual states. According to Breton (2010), some states (e.g., Minnesota, Utah, Vermont and Wisconsin) have developed extensive training models for pre-service and in-service training.
However, the literature does not suggest training standards have changed significantly in most states since the implementation of IDEA 2004 (Breton, 2010).

Some literature on paraeducator training makes specific recommendations (Fox, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1999, Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Rubin, 1994). For instance, prior to working directly with students, paraeducators should receive an initial orientation that provides them with an overview of school policies, community information, teamwork expectations, job responsibilities, teaching principles, and information specific to the students with whom they will be working (Fox, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Paraeducators should receive ongoing training directly related to their job responsibilities, and it should occur at the district, building, and classroom levels (Fox, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Also, paraeducators who work with students with disabilities should be trained in specific learning disabilities and challenging behaviors, autism spectrum disorder, social skills acquisition, and needs of students with low-incidence disabilities (Fox, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1999). Strategies for teaching acquisition of literacy, numeracy, and language skills should be provided through training (Fox, 2003), and in-service training should also cover confidentiality, safe and secure environments for learning, use of technology, and relevant current trends and legislation such as child protection laws and special education law (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

Child development and assessment are other important areas of study for paraeducators (Fox, 2003). Districts should develop annual training plans that provide a systemic way of focusing on the skill development of paraeducators (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). In addition to on-the-job training, paraeducators should have opportunities to attend conferences and workshops and take courses that support their skills, and such training experiences should be designed to allow paraeducators to gain college or other continuing education credit (Giangreco et al., 1999;
As the recommendations for training paraeducators are specific, it would logically follow that standards for evaluating the results of that training, and ultimately the effectiveness of the paraeducators, would also be set. However, very few recommendations regarding the evaluation of paraeducators are described in literature.

Despite these recommendations for training paraeducators, research indicates paraeducators are not regularly provided appropriate training opportunities (Morrissette et al., 2002). Most paraeducators working in New York City schools who responded to a survey in the late 1990s stated they had received no pre-service training to prepare them for assigned positions nor did they receive formal in-service training when they received new assignments. Instead, when asked how they acquired the skills needed to meet their job responsibilities, 79% said they learned about their jobs on their own or by watching and asking questions, 67% indicated they had been taught by their supervisor and/or the teacher to whom they had been assigned, and 40% learned from other paraeducators. A scant 32% of the surveyed paraeducators indicated their school or district had provided them with any type of formal in-service training. When asked how often they had been offered or had attended an in-service training program over a two-year period, the median number of such opportunities reported by the paraeducators was one per year. Fewer than half of the paraeducators were aware of any staff development workshops for paraeducators. During focus group discussions, paraeducators reported they felt unprepared to perform the duties of their jobs. In the same study, teachers expressed concerns regarding a lack of appropriate training for paraeducators. These teachers cited the following as appropriate topics for paraeducator training: effective communication, conflict management, small group and one-to-one instructional skills, and distinction between teacher and paraeducator roles (Moshoyannis
et al., 1999). The teachers’ assessment that paraeducators require training in these areas may indicate that paraeducators should also be evaluated on these skills.

Morrissette et al. (2002) contend that an important consideration in the supervision and training of paraeducators is the amount of time designated for supervising teachers to meet these requirements. Along with time to meet with paraeducators, teachers require time to meet with their own principals to refine their supervision and training skills. Therefore, a school should understand that significant time must be allocated to make a genuine commitment to the training process.

At times, the training of paraeducators is left to other members of the same employee group. A study conducted by Giangreco et al. (1997) in public schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Utah, and Vermont in the mid-1990s suggests that the training of paraeducators often becomes the responsibility of other paraeducators. The paraeducators in Giangreco et al.’s study reported they received most of their in-service training from other paraeducators through conversation and job shadowing. If the training of paraeducators is often left to their colleagues, even though French (2003) contends that training should be a supervisory duty, one is left to wonder how much time and attention supervisors put into the work (and ultimately the value and evaluation) of paraeducators.

Evaluation Concepts

To begin to understand the topic of paraeducator evaluation, I reviewed the literature on employee evaluation, or appraisal, a term often used in the larger scope of businesses and organizations. The essence of performance appraisal is work performance measurement (Gravina & Siers, 2011; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986).
Appraisal has many purposes, which include monitoring and improving employee performance; understanding employee capabilities; fostering the self-development of employees; identifying the professional development needs of an organization; and determining the retention, promotion, transfer, and compensation of employees (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Grote, 2002; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). Appraisal can be used to ensure that employees’ skill sets are maximized and that the performance of employees is aligned to the needs of an organization.

Appraisal improves communication, clarifying both expectations and areas that need attention (Jefferson, 2010). Appraisal has evaluative functions, which serve an organization’s employment decisions such as retention, promotion, transfer, and compensation, and developmental functions that focus on performance improvement through coaching, goal setting, and motivating employees (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986). Although appraisal systems often attempt to serve both functions, it can be very difficult for appraisers to provide evaluative feedback, which can affect important employment decisions and stimulate performance improvement at the same time (Meyer, Kay, & French, 1965; Prowse & Prowse, 2009).

Employees are typically evaluated by their supervisors, as supervisors often have the greatest opportunity to observe the behavior and performance of employees and are likely to be in the position to make or contribute to employment decisions. There are, however, drawbacks to supervisor appraisal, as employees being evaluated by their supervisors may be reluctant to communicate openly with their supervisors, and the supervisor/employee relationship may be damaged if employees feel threatened and defensive about the process. Therefore, other methods
of appraisal (peer, subordinate, outside observer, or self-appraisal) are used in some work settings (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986).

Additionally, forms of appraisal systems vary greatly. Appraisal formats include:

- **Essay Appraisal** - The evaluator writes about an employee’s strengths and weaknesses.
- **Critical Incident Appraisal** - The evaluator measures an employee’s performance in terms of incidents that have taken place during the evaluation period.
- **Checklist Appraisal** - The evaluator considers statements surrounding an employee’s characteristics and performance. Answers are often simply Yes or No and can be quantified.
- **Forced Choice Appraisal** – The evaluator is presented with descriptive statements that are grouped together to appear equally positive or equally negative, and thus, the evaluator does not know which of the statements reflects good or bad performance. The evaluator must determine which statement best describes the employee.
- **Graphic Rating Scale Appraisal** – The evaluator rates an employee against a scale that lists characteristics and a range of performance. This is the most commonly used form of performance appraisal, as it is relatively quick to develop and use and is quantifiable (Jafari, Bourouni, & Amri, 2009; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Sims, 1998). Indeed, teacher evaluations usually follow a graphic rating scale format (Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010).

Regardless of the type of appraisal used, employees are usually evaluated on particular factors called standards or criteria. Such standards establish job tasks and accepted levels of performance and are commonly based on job descriptions (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore,
An alternate approach is the results method, in which the evaluator compares the employee’s performance against the goals and objectives developed between the employee and supervisor (Rebore, 2007).

A description of what occurs as part of effective appraisal is also discussed in literature. For instance, performance review typically includes a meeting between the employee and supervisor, and research suggests a supervisor’s skill in conducting this interview greatly influences whether the appraisal program is effective in motivating improved performance (Meyer & Walker, 1961; Prowse & Prowse, 2009). This performance appraisal interview can serve a variety of purposes, including discussing ratings, engaging in problem solving, setting goals, and explaining administrative decisions (Dickinson, 1993). Also, Ondrack and Oliver (1986) provide guidelines for effective appraisal interviews. According to these researchers, appraisals should be conducted in a private location at a mutually convenient time. The supervisor should emphasize the importance of two-way communication. Thus, the supervisor should invite the employee to ask questions and offer his/her own assessment of his/her performance as well as to be prepared to alter the appraisal based on the data offered by the employee. The evaluator should give specific examples of proficiencies and deficiencies, being careful to emphasize employee strengths and then focus on problem-solving when discussing concerns. A good appraisal system emphasizes future improvement in performance through goal setting. Finally, follow-up is advised, as the evaluator should be available for coaching after the appraisal and should carefully monitor the employee for evidence of improvement. All of these recommendations are meant to support the employee and the employee by leading to performance improvement.
The research literature also considers fairness in appraisal, and such fairness depends on a variety of factors that support the objectivity of the appraisal. Pickett and Gerlach (1997) advise the fairest appraisals come from evaluators who are honest, straightforward, and specific. They also state frequent performance observations yield fairer ratings because such observations allow the evaluator to observe multiple samples of job performance. Fair evaluators are careful to avoid leniency, which is the tendency to give predominantly higher ratings in place of engaging in difficult conversations; they are also charged with the responsibility of keeping appraisals objective rather than inserting their own biases into the ratings (Latham & Wexley, 1993; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986).

Clearly, providing effective feedback is difficult, and thus some managers may experience anxiety and discomfort about employee evaluation while others may avoid it altogether (Kikoski, 1998), perhaps because they do not want to fall out of favor with employees by providing negative feedback or because they are conflict avoidant (Sims, 1998). Other reasons why supervisors may avoid the appraisal process include a lack of certainty regarding criteria and procedures, a fear of causing an unpleasant reaction from the employee, a dislike of being in the position of manipulating others’ lives, a failure to see the process as being relevant, and even an inability to organize time to engage in the process (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986). Concerns over how a negative appraisal can affect an employee can greatly alter the fairness with which an employee is evaluated, as Ilgen and Knowlton (1980) found supervisors significantly distort their feedback to make it more positive for low performers, particularly when they believe the poor performance is due to lack of ability. All of these factors are hurdles supervisors must overcome to provide employees with the feedback necessary for performance improvement.
Because providing fair appraisal is a difficult process, appraiser training that addresses these concerns is important. Thus, Grote (2002) recommends organizations provide managers with a formal appraisal training program prior to expecting them to evaluate employees, create informational materials about the appraisal process for managers, and provide opportunities for managers to review the process through annual training. Managers should gain a wide range of competencies from an evaluation training program, including complete understanding of evaluation procedures and materials; ability to create and gain agreement on specific, challenging, measurable goals; knowledge of factors that generate motivation; ability to use those factors to increase job performance; and ability to assess an employee’s strengths and weaknesses and discuss appraisals while building positive working relationships (Grote, 2002). Evaluation training can also help managers write fair appraisals and conduct effective appraisal interviews (Sims, 1998) as well as avoid making appraisal errors (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986). As managers are usually unaware that they are making appraisal errors (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986), having opportunities to practice and receive useful feedback on their appraisal skills increases the probability a training program will cause permanent change in evaluator behavior (Latham & Wexley, 1993).

Such evaluator training can greatly affect the appraisal experience, as can the extent to which an employee participates in the appraisal process. Research suggests there is a strong relationship between performance appraisal participation and an employee’s perception of fairness and utility of an appraisal, motivation to improve, and overall satisfaction with the process (Cawley et al., 1998). Employees can participate in the process by helping to develop performance standards or the rating form, participating in self-appraisal, and setting goals (Roberts, 2003).
Employee participation in goal setting is especially important when the process is used for developmental purposes, as research suggests setting goals when receiving feedback has a positive effect on an employee’s motivation to improve performance and the employee’s perception of the overall success of the appraisal process (Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979). Research also suggests collaboration between a supervisor and employee around the topic of goal setting can lead to superior results (Meyer et al., 1965). Goal setting affects performance because goals focus activity and direct the expenditure of energy, as people put forth effort in proportion to the difficulty of the goal. People are more persistent in working to meet difficult goals than they are when working toward easy goals. Thus, specific goals that are difficult but attainable lead to effective performance (Latham & Wexley, 1993).

The research available on the topic of employee appraisal served as a conceptual framework for this study of the evaluation of paraeducators. Specifically, the extent to which the processes for paraeducator evaluation lead to enhanced paraeducator performance and support employment decisions in relation to paraeducators was considered.

Evaluation of Paraeducators

The literature on employee evaluation explains appraisal is valuable because it supports an understanding of employee capabilities and the improvement of employee performance; fosters the self-development of employees; identifies the professional development needs of an organization; and helps to determine the retention, promotion, transfer, and compensation of employees (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). Logic follows, then, that paraeducators should receive regular performance evaluations, as performance review is important for all staff and the outcomes should be important to school principals. Careful
evaluation of paraeducators indicates to the paraeducators and the rest of the staff that the work of these professionals is valued. Time should be designated for an uninterrupted interview between the paraeducator and evaluator, and this interview should cover growth made since the last evaluation, current observational data, self-assessment, agreement regarding new goals, and an action plan that will be put into place to support meeting those goals (Giangreco et al., 1999; Watkinson, 2008). Grote (2002) suggests such meetings should last approximately 45 minutes.

Very little research has been conducted regarding the evaluation of paraeducators (Bartholomew, 2002; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002). Some data, however, indicate paraeducator evaluation is sometimes neglected. For example, 26% of paraeducators who responded to a survey in 2001 stated they were not formally evaluated. One paraeducator wrote on her survey, “In the nine years I worked in this district, I have received two evaluations! Feedback does not happen” (Riggs & Mueller, 2001, p. 58). Another article by Mueller (2002) states paraeducators reported that when they are evaluated, the appraisals are conducted by principals who are unfamiliar with their work, thus making the reviews irrelevant. However, no specific data are cited to back up this statement. Another author, Watkinson (2008), stated that in many cases paraeducators only receive 5- to 10-minute annual appraisal interviews. Again, no research is cited to support the statement. In addition, Riggs and Mueller (2001) explain many of the paraeducator respondents to their survey indicated they were unclear about how, when, and by whom they were evaluated. Thus, although the findings in literature indicate that paraeducator evaluations are not designed to support performance improvement, the lack of data to support the descriptions of paraeducator evaluation in literature indicates a need for further research.

As discussed earlier, teachers are generally assigned the responsibility of supervising paraeducators; sometimes this supervisory duty extends to evaluation. For example, special
education teachers in Colorado were surveyed in the late 1990s, and 56.6% of the respondents reported they assumed primary responsibility for evaluating paraeducators. Of these, about half stated that although they did the work of the evaluation, the principal signed the official appraisal form (French, 2001). Seventy-four percent of the respondents to the 2001 Riggs and Mueller study indicated they received evaluations, primarily conducted by special education teachers in collaboration with principals. Another survey conducted in New York City schools showed fewer instances (24%) of teachers assessing paraeducator performance (Moshoyannis et al., 1999). Morrissette et al. (2002) highlight concerns regarding supervising teachers’ lack of preparation to evaluate paraeducators. The researchers state that formal coursework regarding preparation for effective paraeducator evaluation could not be found in a large sample of teacher education programs. They also suggest teachers may underestimate the importance of an effective evaluation process. Ultimately, Morrissette et al. conclude that appraisals completed by unprepared evaluators may lead to the continuing employment of incompetent paraeducators.

Ultimately, it is often the school administrator who formally evaluates a paraeducator, although supervising teachers and other licensed staff members may contribute to paraeducator evaluations since they work very closely with paraeducators and have frequent opportunities to observe their work (French, 2003). Morgan and Ashbaker (2002) summarized a 2000 survey of over 800 participants in the Supervisory and Administrative Endorsement programs at Utah State University and Brigham Young University and stated results indicated principals held the responsibility for evaluating paraeducators. This study was replicated by Bartholomew in 2002. Bartholomew found that when principals were asked if they evaluated paraeducators, 58.1% reported they evaluated Title 1 paraeducators, 61.5% reported they evaluated special education paraeducators, 39.6% reported they evaluated bilingual paraeducators, and 50.9% reported they
evaluated other paraeducators. Some researchers contend that it is indeed the responsibility of the administrators to evaluate paraeducators since they have the overall responsibility of what occurs in the school (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006, 2013). Morrissette et al. (2002), however, provide an opposing point of view, explaining that principals may lack appropriate evaluation skills and be unable to observe paraeducators regularly due to time constraints.

Regardless of who evaluates paraeducators, the process likely incorporates the following components: conducting pre-observation activities including establishing criteria for acceptable performance and developing evaluative instruments, collecting data through formal observation, analyzing the results, and conferencing with the paraeducator to provide feedback and identify strategies for performance improvement (French, 2003; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Watkinson, 2008).

Summary

There is ample literature on employee appraisal, but the topic of paraeducator evaluation is largely unexplored. Available literature is limited to a few surveys that asked paraeducators, principals, and teachers about the frequency of and responsibility for paraeducator evaluation. I found no studies that considered the actual experience of paraeducator evaluation from either the evaluator’s or the employee’s perspective. Exploration of the value of the evaluations that take place is also largely missing from the literature.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose Overview

The value of performance evaluation, or appraisal, is well documented, and uses for appraisal in businesses and other organizations have been richly explored in research literature (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). However, the topic of paraeducator evaluation has been largely unexplored (Bartholomew, 2002; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2002) even though research (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Etscheidt, 2005; French 2003; Giangreco et al., 1997; Moshoyannis et al., 1999; Rubin, 1994) has shown that paraeducators play many roles in the functioning of a school. This study investigated paraeducators’ and principals’ perceptions of paraeducator evaluations to address the gap in knowledge regarding how paraeducators are evaluated.

Research Question

To consider the problem, the following research question was studied: What is the process of paraeducator evaluation? The following subquestions were also investigated:

1) How do paraeducators perceive their experiences with evaluations in their schools?
2) How do principals perceive their experiences of participating in paraeducator evaluation?
Design

The qualitative method used for this research project was case study. A case study is a detailed study of a subject, setting, event, or set of documents that helps a researcher gain a deep understanding of a contemporary phenomenon, situation, or problem in depth and within real-life context and explore the meaning for those involved (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2009). Merriam (1998) explained that a case has boundaries, and thus a case is a single entity, perhaps a class, a school, or a community. Therefore, in this study, the school district was the case, and the subject or situation being studied was paraeducator evaluation. The research was conducted using a qualitative method of interviewing. Qualitative researchers work to understand the meaning individuals have built around their own experiences (Merriam, 1998), and thus qualitative interviewing is a method for discovering others’ feelings, thoughts, and experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As I was interested in the paraeducators’ own descriptions of being evaluated and the principals’ descriptions of participating in paraeducator evaluation, utilizing a qualitative approach was appropriate.

Population and Sampling

The population in this bounded case study (Merriam, 1998) was paraeducators and principals working in the public elementary school district selected for the study. Millstone School District 3 was selected because its size and recent structural changes made it ideal for this study. Although expecting to interview participants until data saturation was reached, I sought to interview at least six principals and at least six paraeducators to provide for an adequate number of participants (Merriam, 1998), and as there are 12 schools in Millstone School District 3, I was
confident I could find enough participants for the study. In addition, Millstone School District 3 had experienced programmatic changes over the past few years regarding various special education programs being reassigned to different schools, and these changes resulted in some paraeducators being moved from building to building. Thus, I knew I would be able to interview paraeducators who had a variety of experiences and would have been evaluated by more than one principal.

The case study focuses on Millstone School District 3, an elementary district of nine elementary schools, two middle schools, and an early childhood center. Millstone School District 3 serves over 5,200 students. Disclosing the identities of both the case and the individual participants is generally desirable in a case study (Yin, 2009), as the reader can understand the study within a context with which he/she may already be familiar and because the presence of real names makes the case easier to review when checking information. However, confidentiality may be appropriate in some situations, such as when a case study is created around a controversial topic (Yin, 2009). Thus, as the topic of evaluation can be sensitive, the use of pseudonyms selected by me was appropriate in this study.

The paraeducators and principals selected for this study work in the same school district. However, paraeducators and principals were selected from different schools to reduce fear of retaliation and enhance freedom of expression (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) as it is legitimate to assume that paraeducators would be fearful of letting their principals know what they truly think about the support provided to them through the evaluation process.

In this study, purposeful sampling was used where information-rich cases were selected for in-depth study to inform me on issues important to the purpose of the study (Patton, 1990). When identifying how many participants will be interviewed, a researcher must consider the
questions being asked and the data being gathered and must interview an adequate number of participants to answer the research question so the purpose of the study is fulfilled (Merriam, 1998). In this case, I interviewed paraeducators and principals until I reached data saturation, which is the point in data collection when the information collected becomes redundant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I began with the expectation that interviewing at least six participants in each employee group would result in a reasonable level of saturation.

To gain access to the paraeducators and principals, I identified a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are the individuals who grant the researcher permission to be present and conduct the research with the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I contacted the Associate Superintendent of Human Resources in the district, who helped me gain access to propose the process to the Superintendent (see Appendix E). Once approved, I worked with the Associate Superintendent of Human Resources to set up voluntary interviews with paraeducators and principals. According to Yin (2009), candidate selection can be accomplished by gaining input from people who are knowledgeable about each candidate. Thus, I asked the Associate Superintendent of Human Resources, who has worked in Millstone School District 3 for a very long time and has a strong knowledge base of the staff, to help me select 12 potential participants from the pool who were likely to represent a variety of sources of information.

After the first 12 participants were interviewed, then snowball sampling was used in this study, as interviewees recommended other information-rich research subjects for participation in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 1990). Because the six principal interviews resulted in data saturation, I did not seek other principal participants. However, the responses from the paraeducators were quite varied; therefore, I sought more paraeducator participants beyond the initial six. In total, I interviewed 14 paraeducators until I was satisfied I had reached saturation.
I sought and was ultimately able to gain consent to interview a range of paraeducator participants: paraeducators with experiences working in only one school and paraeducators with experiences working in more than one school; paraeducators who have worked as paraeducators for six years or fewer and paraeducators who have worked for more than six years; and paraeducators working in different programs (see Appendix F). The vast majority of paraeducators in Millstone School District 3 work in special education programs, and thus at the time of the interviews, eight of the paraeducators were working with students who receive special education support in kindergarten through eighth grade. An additional four paraeducators worked with young students in the early childhood program, and many of those students also received special education services. One paraeducator was working as a bilingual assistant and had always done so throughout her career. One paraeducator who was working at the early childhood center had previously been a reading assistant. The length of time the paraeducators had worked within the school system ranged from 5 to 22 years, and the paraeducators had worked in one to three schools within the school district. Eight of the paraeducators had moved schools during their careers in Millstone School District 3 and, thus, had experiences working in various schools and with different principals throughout the district. Some of them also referenced being evaluated by different administrators during different evaluation years at the same school. Two of the paraeducators had worked as teachers outside of this school system prior to being assistants.

I also sought and was able to interview a range of principal participants so different experiences are reflected within the research: principals/assistant principals with experience working as administrators only in the case study school district vs. principals/assistant principals with administrative experience in other districts as well; principals/assistant principals who have
served in their positions for three years or fewer vs. principals/assistant principals who have served for more than three years. The length of time principals had worked within the school district ranged from 2 to 10 years, and all of the principals had worked only in one school throughout their employment in Millstone School District 3. The principals had worked as administrators for 3 to 21 years and had worked in three to eight different school districts as administrators and teachers.

Eight of the 12 schools in Millstone School District 3 (67%) were used as interview sites. The principals came from four elementary schools and one middle school. Both the principal and the assistant principal were interviewed at the middle school. At the time of the interviews, the paraeducators worked and were interviewed at three elementary schools, one middle school, and the early childhood center.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data were collected through structured interviews with the study participants. In addition, relevant school district documents were reviewed, including the current paraeducator evaluation document and two prior paraeducator evaluation documents, the paraeducator job descriptions, and the paraeducator collective bargaining agreement.

Interviews

Before I interviewed the participants in the case study district, pilot interviews were conducted with principals and paraeducators who do not work in Millstone School District 3. Researchers often select their pilot cases based on convenience, access, and geographic proximity (Yin, 2009); therefore, I selected participants from the school district in which I
worked and also interviewed principals and paraeducators who live in my community. Through conducting these pilot interviews, I assessed my interview questions and adjusted the questions to confirm that they resulted in data that responded to the research questions.

In a qualitative interview study, the researcher carefully listens to discover the meaning of data as it is collected. Concerns that could appear important at the beginning of the study may become less so as the research develops, whereas ideas that seem to be unimportant initially might prove to be very valuable to the study, and thus the questioning was redesigned throughout the study. For example, if a particular answer suggested a new line of inquiry, then the set of interview questions was revised (Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The questions evolved as I studied the topic through the eyes of the interviewed subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Thus, although I asked a set of structured interview questions, I was careful to add a variety of follow-up questions to gather more information as themes began to emerge.

Research was conducted in an elementary school district in a suburb of Chicago. The paraeducators and principals were interviewed in offices and one empty cafeteria within the school district. Long interviews are difficult to recapture through an interviewer’s recall skills (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), and thus interview data were collected through the use of a recording device. A review of the paraeducator evaluation tools used in the Millstone School District 3 along with reviews of the job descriptions and collective bargaining agreement also resulted in data.

I used interview guides. It is noted, however, that even when such guides are utilized, qualitative interviewing offers the interviewer latitude to revise the questions during a meeting. Such flexibility is advised because if the interviewer is too rigid in controlling the content of an interview, the subject cannot fully communicate his or her story (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Thus,
I asked many follow-up questions during the interviews to gain as much information as possible and provided new lines of questioning when the participants took conversations in new directions.

Qualitative interviewing is meant to gather data without predetermining responses. Thus, the interview questions were designed to be open ended so participants could respond without me leading them toward a particular response. Truly open-ended questions permit the individuals being interviewed to take whatever direction they want when responding so they could best represent their thoughts (Patton, 1990). Using open ended questions resulted in varying types of responses to questions, and therefore, analysis of data resulted in themes that did not include information from 100% of the participants for each theme. The interview guides for structured interviews using open-ended questions can be found in Appendix A.

**School District Documents**

This study included a review of the appraisal document (Appendix C) used to evaluate the paraeducators in the study. The paraeducator appraisal document in the case study district was revised in 2012, and many study participants referenced the changes that had been instituted with the adoption of the new document. Therefore, a previous appraisal instrument was also examined (see Appendix D). In addition, I examined the collective bargaining agreement and job descriptions for paraeducators in the case study district to gain a deeper understanding of the written expectations for paraeducators and the appraisal process (see Appendices B and E). The process of relying on multiple sources contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 1999). The appraisal documents, job descriptions, and collective bargaining agreement were used to triangulate the interview data, as they were considered alongside the transcribed interviews of
paraeducators and principals. These sources of data together contributed to the validity of the data.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. However, reliability is problematic in the social sciences because human behavior is always changing (Merriam, 1998). In this qualitative study, I sought to design the research project so the design itself can be replicated. I considered reliability in the design by planning to use consistent questions when conducting interviews with the different participants. However, the flexible, continuous nature of qualitative interviewing caused me to revise the questions during individual interviews (Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The training and practice of the researcher as the instrument of inquiry is important to reliability (Merriam, 1998). A skill required of a qualitative interviewer is careful listening, and thus listening skills must be developed in the interviewer, who has to listen intently to identify key words and ideas and be alert to important omissions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I already had a great deal of practice conducting many types of interviews and had participated in training to develop active listening skills.

When measuring the validity of data, the researcher must consider whether the data truly reflect what he/she intended it to reflect. In qualitative studies, validity relies greatly on the skill of the researcher and his/her attention to detail (Patton, 1990). To ensure validity, I used member checking to determine if the participants agree the transcripts of the interviews were correct recordings of what they said (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Specifically, I emailed the transcripts to the participants, and in all cases the participants validated the contents of the interviews. Studies that only use one data collection method are more vulnerable to errors than
studies that utilize multiple methods (Patton, 1990), and therefore triangulation was also used to validate the data, as the paraeducator evaluation documents, paraeducator job descriptions, and collective bargaining agreement were considered alongside the interview transcripts from the paraeducators and principals.

Data Analysis

Data that had been captured on audiotape were transferred into a written version, or transcript, of each interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Next, I developed a descriptive coding system by searching through the data looking for patterns and topics. A code is typically a word or phrase that captures the essence of a piece of data, and thus the words and phrases representing patterns and topics became the coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Saldaña, 2013). I then sorted the data using a manual coding process, being mindful that many passages can serve different purposes, patterns, or themes (Patton, 1990). As I worked with multiple participants in the study, I coded one participant’s data first and then coded the second participant’s data, and so on. I began with lumper coding, in which a large amount of data is lumped together. One code is assigned to that data to represent the essence of an excerpt and then the data are coded further with splitter coding by separating the data into smaller pieces (Saldaña, 2013). For example, all of the participants’ comments about feedback were lumped together into groupings of Feedback from Principals and Feedback from Teachers, and then the data were further split into smaller groupings such as Formal Feedback and Informal Feedback. Using a system described by Rubin and Rubin, (1995), I searched for statements and themes that were repeated several times in the data. Data was reviewed many times, and new insights arose as concepts fit together, and in this way I was able to gain a broader understanding of the meaning
that emerged from the data. Thus, I then developed important themes that became apparent and connected interrelating themes.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This study sought to investigate the research question: What is the process of paraeducator evaluation? This question was studied using qualitative methods through interviews with paraeducators and principals who participated in paraeducator evaluations in a mid-sized elementary school district in a suburb of a large city. The following subquestions were used to focus the study:

1. How do paraeducators perceive their experiences with evaluations in their schools?
2. How do principals perceive their experiences of participating in paraeducator evaluation?

To set the context for understanding paraeducator evaluation in this study, the procedures utilized by this district are described first. Then themes emerging from analysis and interpretation of data in relation to each subquestion are presented in the remainder of Chapter 4.

Millstone School District 3 Paraeducator Evaluation Procedures

Knowledge about paraeducator evaluation procedures at Millstone School District 3 is necessary to provide background for understanding the data and themes that emerged in this
study. A review of Millstone School District 3 documents indicated that procedures for evaluating paraeducators were found in the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) along with the instrument used to evaluate paraeducators (see Appendices B and C). In this school district, paraeducators are evaluated at least every other year by their principal, assistant principal, or another administrator such as a special education facilitator. By October 1 of each year, paraeducators are notified if they will be evaluated that year. As explained in the CBA, the District 3 evaluation process should be completed by May 1. According to the documents, evaluators may gather input from supervising teachers as part of the process. French (2003) noted that such input is useful for enabling principals to provide paraeducators with accurate evaluations since the teachers work closely with the paraeducators.

The district’s documents revealed that evaluations should include a conference between the paraeducator and evaluator as well as written documentation of the performance appraisal. Documentation is based on a rating scale, a format known in employee appraisal literature as a graphic rating scale appraisal, the most commonly used form of performance appraisal that rates an employee against a scale of characteristics and a range of performance designations (Jafari, Bourouni, & Amri, 2009; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Sims, 1998). The District 3 evaluation instrument also included a space for comments about each rating category and an area for summary comments.

According to the district’s appraisal document (see Appendix C), paraeducators are rated in the following eleven categories: job knowledge, quality of work, timeliness of work, interpersonal skills, acceptance of supervision, collaboration, communication skills, adaptability, commitment, attendance, and observance of safe practices and procedures. The criteria for rating are categorized into four scales: Exceeds Standard, Meets Standard, Needs Improvement, and
Does Not Meet Standard, with descriptions for each category. For example, the Exceeds Standard descriptor for the job knowledge category reads, “Consistently performs duties that contribute to the students’ and the school’s success,” and the Meets Standard for that category reads, “Frequently demonstrates abilities within critical elements of the job.” Although the paraeducators in District 3 are rated in the eleven categories listed above, the ratings are considered individually and paraeducators are not assigned a summative rating. The current appraisal document used in this study was adopted in 2012 when a prior document from 2007 (see Appendix D) was revised with two additions: a fourth rating category (Needs Improvement) and the inclusion of a checkbox the evaluator can mark to indicate if a teacher’s input was received for the evaluation. Participants confirmed this was the appraisal tool used to evaluate paraeducators in District 3.

Research Subquestion 1
How do paraeducators perceive their experiences with evaluations in their schools?

Based on analysis of data corresponding to Research Subquestion 1, three themes emerged: 1) Inconsistencies in the Paraeducator Evaluation Process, 2) Feedback with Limited Value, and 3) Lack of Clarity Regarding Purpose of Evaluations.

Inconsistencies in the Paraeducator Evaluation Process

Although the District 3 collective bargaining agreement (Appendix B) and paraeducator evaluation instrument (Appendix C) provide an evaluation rating scale and timeline, along with a directive that paraeducators and principals must have an evaluation conference, there was no written explanation regarding how appraisal data should be collected except that teacher input
was invited. What emerged from the interview data was the existence of wide variance in paraeducators’ evaluation experiences, resulting in a system unlikely to offer all paraeducators consistent professional growth opportunities through such a process.

As explained by participants in the study, inconsistencies in this study were described as the discrepancies in procedures and outcomes. For example, two of the fourteen interviewed paraeducators described different experiences in the overall evaluation process. Carolyn noted, “There's a couple of problems with how it's been done across the district. We're trying to get it more mainstreamed because when people change positions or move to different schools, the whole process is different” (Interview, 9-29-14). Wanda concurred; she perceived the evaluation process to be varied across schools in the district and observed:

I would say one of the things that I've been hearing is there seems to still be an inconsistency throughout the district, depending on which building you're working in. I think they're trying to streamline that, but I think that [the principals aren’t] all on the same page. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Throughout the interviews, the paraeducators described different experiences and understandings of the process, resulting in three subthemes: observations, evaluation meetings, and valuing paraeducators.

**Inconsistencies Regarding Observations**

Within the employee appraisal literature, Murphy and Cleveland (1995) recommend that supervisors observe a wide range of behaviors relevant to job goals in evaluating employee performance, and Ilgen (1983) agrees that observation is important to accuracy in appraisal of work outcomes. For example, criterion-related validity, which is the relationship between rating scores and measures of job performance, requires that an evaluator observe the employee
performing tasks (McKirchy, 1998). French (2003), Pickett and Gerla (1997), and Watkinson (2008), all writing specifically about paraeducator evaluation, recommend that evaluators gather firsthand knowledge of the paraeducator’s performance through scheduled observations. An even clearer explanation of observational data related to validity in evaluations was offered by Danielson (2008) with reference to teachers:

> Conversations about teaching must be grounded in actual events, in actions or statements, in artifacts, or in decisions a teacher has made. Without such grounding, impressions of teachers' skills are based entirely on the observers' own idiosyncratic views of teaching and their understandings of what has occurred and what those events mean. For evaluators, evidence is the foundation of judgments they make about teachers. All the evidence they assemble, from a variety of sources—for example, formal and informal observations of practice or artifacts for those aspects of practice not observed in the classroom—serve as the basis of decisions they make about renewing a contract or offering tenure. (p.1)

Observation is required as part of teacher evaluation in some states, and in Illinois, state law (Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010) requires that formal teacher observations are structured to collect objective data. Included in this process are a pre-observation meeting, a pre-arranged observation, and a post-observation meeting. In addition, informal observations of teachers are required in Illinois. Informal observations are defined as observations that are not announced to the employee in advance, and although they do not require a conference prior to the observation, the evaluators are required to give teachers feedback orally or in writing.

Contrary to teacher evaluation, Illinois does not have a state-mandated observation requirement for paraeducators, nor did District 3 documents require observations of paraeducators as part of the evaluation process. The data showed a wide range of perceptions and memories about being observed. For example, only Ann indicated that her principal formally observed her and that this should be part of the required process. She said:
To the best of my knowledge, we’re observed at least once. I think [principal’s name] observes more than once, and everything you do. After she watches you, she writes everything down… She comes and observes you in the classroom, how you relate to children, how well you’re prepared with curriculum. Things of that sort. I do think that whomever is evaluating you…should actually observe you. (Interview, 10-10-14)

In contrast, seven other paraeducators (50%) described evaluation processes that did not include formal observations focused on their performance in the classroom. For example, Audrey asserted, “In any of the 15 years…I’ve never had a formal observation” (Interview, 9-29-2014), and Carolyn agreed, explaining: “A lot of times the person who's being evaluated is not observed by the evaluator.” Similarly, when asked if she is observed by the evaluator, Maria simply replied, “No, no” (Interview, 10-10-2014).

Two of the fourteen paraeducators (14%) described paraeducator observations that occurred as the principals were performing other duties, such as simply dropping into the classroom or observing the teacher. For instance, Denise described her informal observation in this way: “She [the principal] comes into our room on and off throughout the school year. Not really a formal [observation] in the classroom” (Interview, 10-10-2014). In a similar fashion, Beth remembered:

The last time she came in, she had come in to observe the teacher and decided to observe us when she was in there. I think in total she was there for 30 minutes. There was a teacher she was observing and then there were three assistants in that room. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

In other instances, two of the fourteen paraeducators (14%) were unsure of whether they had or had not been observed. For example, Quinn remarked that in any place of employment, an employee is aware that he or she is being observed formally or informally, and therefore, she assumed those observational data were part of her evaluation even though she did not remember specific instances of being observed (Interview, 10-10-2014). Like Quinn, Kate also provided an
assumption: “He [the principal] does walk around the building a lot. He’s in and out of the classrooms, so I’m assuming at that time he’s watching me or watching what I do” (Interview, 9-29-2014).

Throughout the interviews, all of the paraeducators described evaluation data collection procedures that were unpredictable and inconsistent, specifically in the area of observation. The experiences of those paraeducators who were not observed conflict with the recommendations in literature about employee appraisal, as research (Ilgen, 1983; McKirchy, 1998) suggests valid appraisals should be based on the evaluator observing the employee perform tasks. In District 3, paraeducators’ opportunities to be evaluated through observations are based on choices the evaluators make independent of a systemic requirement.

Inconsistencies Regarding Evaluation Meetings

A second subtheme emerged in the data: inconsistencies regarding evaluation meetings. Recommendations from literature describe evaluation meetings of approximately 45 minutes (Grote, 2002) that are focused on current observational data, self-assessment provided by the paraeducator, and goal setting (Giangreco et al., 1999; Watkinson, 2008). As there was no written guidance in the District 3 collective bargaining agreement (Appendix B) or the paraeducator evaluation instrument (Appendix C) regarding how meetings should be conducted or what types of conversations should take place during meetings, the paraeducators’ descriptions of their experiences revealed variations. Some of the paraeducators described experiences that supported their growth, such as having had opportunities to discuss comments and ask questions. In contrast, other paraeducators remembered experiences that did not support professional development, such as attending brief meetings during which they received but did
not respond to information or even being present at meetings set solely to sign the evaluation document.

For four of the paraeducators (29%), opportunities were provided during meetings to voice their own thoughts, including discourse, when they did not agree with written comments. In addition, there were opportunities to ask questions of their evaluators. For example, Tamara stated, “If I felt something wasn’t fair or if I really felt I was being wrongly evaluated, I have the opportunity to ask any questions or wonder why or whatever” (Interview, 10-10-14). Similarly, Carolyn remembered, “We can talk, and then [address] any questions or comments” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Nancy concurred, “They go through the whole entire evaluation and anything that you have, you wait to comment until the end. And then if you have anything to comment on or anything, you let them know” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Nancy was also optimistic about her next evaluation, as she had transferred to a new school and had heard from colleagues that her new principal would meet with her for twenty to thirty minutes and tell her if she needed to improve in any areas (Interview, 9-29-2014). Similarly, while Quinn knew that she could present her point of view during an evaluation meeting, recalling her principal inviting her to add to the evaluation document, she stated that she had not taken advantage of that opportunity (Interview, 10-10-2014).

Although Beth admitted that she had the opportunity to ask questions, when she did not, she felt there was no conversation: “She [the principal] just gave me a copy, I read it over, she asked me if I had any questions. I said no. She made a copy, and that was it” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Beth believed the principal was not invested in her development and, thus, did not choose to probe further and guide the conversation toward the self-reflection that could lead to professional growth for the paraeducator. Similarly, although Nancy described her desire to
receive feedback that would support her professional development, she said she was disappointed by the outcome during an evaluation meeting experience:

There was just no interest in even going over it with me. It was literally, ‘This is good, good, good, good.’ Didn’t even take the time to talk about it, like, ‘Oh, maybe in this situation, you could do this.’ It was never…It’s literally just hand it to you, look it over. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Carolyn described similar experiences when she asserted:

Sometimes you don’t get talked to. Sometimes you just get brought in and get handed a piece of paper and they say, ‘Hey, this is your evaluation. Sign it and I’ll give you a copy and we’ll be done with it.’ (Interview, 9-29-2014)

In addition to describing discrepant experiences regarding discourse about evaluations, the paraeducators’ memories of their experiences regarding when they were able to view their written evaluation documents varied. The qualitative data indicated that the timing of conference meetings was important to the paraeducators because of the opportunity to reflect before meeting with their evaluators. This was best captured when Kate, one of the paraeducators (79%) who did see her evaluation prior to the meeting, spoke very positively about one of her principals who gave her the chance to take her evaluation home for a week and reflect before having their meeting. She was glad that she was not put “on the spot” (Interview, 9-29-2014).

In other cases, however, three of the fourteen paraeducators (21%) said they saw their written evaluations for the first time during the conference meeting. For instance, Carolyn described that experience in this way: “We do not get anything written in advance” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Sandy had a similar experience to that of Carolyn: “Pretty much when we walk in; we don’t get it [the written evaluation] before [the meeting]” (Interview, 9-29-2014).

Quinn took Carolyn’s and Sandy’s comments a step further by explaining why she would have liked the opportunity to see her evaluation before the meeting:
I have given this some thought, and I think it would be nice to see this [the written evaluation] ahead of time. Because if there was something in here that really... When you’re seeing this, you come in... It’s just natural to be a little anxious, so you’re looking at this, plus you know you have to get back to class and take care of a few things. You’re looking at it and you need time to process it. To see it beforehand... you can ask questions and be prepared with comments. I remember her saying, ‘Is there anything that you would like to put down, you can,’ and I said, ‘No’ because I have to process things. That’s the type of person I am. I really have to think about it. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Quinn’s comments revealed her feelings of anxiousness and being rushed during evaluation meetings, thereby confirming she needed time to process and reflect on the feedback she received.

Paraeducators also spoke about the length of evaluation meetings to review the final evaluation document, and paralleling the other aspects of the evaluation meetings, their experiences were discrepant from research recommendations and from each other. While some (43%) did not mention the length of the meetings, the general consensus was that the meetings in District 3 were considerably shorter than Grote’s (2002) suggestion of 45 minutes as a reasonable amount of time for an evaluation meeting. Three of the paraeducators (21%) mentioned evaluation meetings that lasted approximately 20 minutes, whereas other paraeducators (36%) described even shorter meetings. Audrey, for instance, discussed meetings that were only “a minute long” (Interview, 9-29-2014), while Carrie stated that they were only “a couple of minutes” in length (Interview, 9-29-2014). Kate’s experience was not much longer; she reported meetings that were “only five minutes” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Michaela remembered having only “10 minutes with her [the evaluator]” (Interview, 9-29-2014), again revealing extremely limited time devoted to discourse about their evaluations. Such experiences led Denise to interpret the brevity as, “Okay, your five minutes are up. You need to go. I need to get on to the next one” (Interview, 10-10-2014).
In summary, inconsistencies were found in the paraeducator evaluation meeting process in District 3. While 71% of the paraeducators did not mention the topics of discussion during their evaluation meetings, three of the fourteen paraeducators (29%) noted that the principals were not willing to take time to discuss the paraeducators’ work performance if there were no problems. In this respect, the evaluation process in District 3, as described by those paraeducators, is in contrast to research by Burke and Wilcox (1969), Grote (2002), Ondrack and Oliver (1986), and Rebore (2007), who contend that the process leading to performance improvement is one of the purposes of evaluation. Although four of the fourteen paraeducators (29%) remembered having the chance to ask questions during evaluation meetings, none of the paraeducators in this study described an evaluation process that demonstrated rich conversations focused on growth and performance improvement during meetings. There is also no evidence in any of the written materials from District 3 that reflection and growth experiences were intended to be a part of the paraeducator evaluation process, suggesting a lack of true purpose for the meetings.

**Inconsistencies Regarding Valuing Paraeducators**

A third subtheme emerged in the data: inconsistencies regarding valuing paraeducators. Perhaps because so many of the procedures and expectations of the evaluation process are undefined in District 3 and the paraeducators described different experiences, the extent to which paraeducators felt valued was found to be inconsistent. To feel valued was exemplified by phrases like “she respects us,” “I’m valued,” “important,” “integral part.” While some paraeducators (36%) believed they were valued by their principals and other members of the school community, others perceived that they were not valued or respected (43%), and 21% of
the paraeducators did not discuss this topic at all. As feeling respected by others is a basic human need (Maslow, 1954), the paraeducators engaged in dialogue about this topic often throughout the interviews, although none of the interview questions specifically asked about feelings of value or respect.

Five paraeducators (36%) spoke about feeling valued by members of the school community. For instance, Denise stated the following about her principal: “I think she sees what we do, and she respects us very much. She knows that we are very hard workers” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Sandy had similar comments: “I know I'm valued in this building. We are told that over and over at times.” She explained that the principal tells them this often, and she expressed that she also feels valued by her supervising teachers: “And each teacher, we’re lucky because anybody I’ve been in contact with does value us” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Tamara also spoke about being valued when she stated, “It's a...really important job in the classroom. If we’re not there, the teachers really miss us” (Interview, 10-10-2014). In addition, Maria showed that she felt valued by the families and students with whom she worked when she told stories about being invited to the weddings of former students (Interview, 10-10-2014). Similarly, Audrey described the importance of support staff members and feeling valued in this way:

The other staff members...have roles that are as important in different ways than teachers. You couldn’t operate without all those other roles, whether it be the secretaries and the paras and the custodial staff...Some teachers will say you put in as much energy and love into that job as teachers do. (Interview, 9-29-2014)

In contrast, six paraeducators (43%) described perceptions of feeling undervalued by the school system. For example, although Audrey perceived she was valued by some teachers, she expressed that the lack of time and effort principals put into the evaluation process “demeaned
our profession” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Denise also indicated that she felt her principal did not believe she was important enough for thoughtful evaluation when she remarked:

I just want to say that I think that there’s not a whole lot of consideration taken with the evaluations. It’s just kind of a matter of they know that they need to do it every other year, and just want to get it done. It’s kind of like, ‘Okay, let me get [paraeducator’s name] evaluation. Check, check, check, check. Okay, I’ll go talk to her quickly; that’s done.’ It’s just like a mandatory thing that they need to get done and want to be done with it. I don’t think that there’s really much thought put into it. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

When Audrey, Carolyn, and Maria pointed out that they were never formally observed by their principals and when Denise and Beth described brief informal observations that occurred while principals were performing other administrative tasks, they alluded to feeling undervalued. It appeared to the paraeducators that the principals were not expected to have firsthand knowledge of their performance, signaling to the paraeducators that they were not important enough for their evaluators to spend time watching them perform their duties.

Expressing their concerns more strongly, three of the fourteen paraeducators (21%) described the overriding feeling that they were being disrespected and undervalued in ways that did not seem to be specifically linked to evaluation. For example, Carolyn had tears in her eyes when she expressed feelings about how paraeducator work is viewed: “We’re nobodies in a lot of ways, people think…a lot of people think that,” and explained that paraeducators are “doing it for the kids,” but she felt that “it’s not always seen that way” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Denise concurred with Carolyn that paraeducators are disrespected and undervalued by administrators. Although she was glad that her own principal valued her, Denise angrily asserted that central office administrators do not respect paraeducators:

Honestly, I don’t think there is any respect for us from administration anyways. I don’t feel that they respect us in the very least bit. I’ve been on the negotiation team, and I see the way they talk to us. I feel like they think we are just dirt. It’s disgusting… Central
administration thinks that we’re very disposable. It’s how they talk to us. You can just
tell that they don’t respect us at all. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Similarly, Maria expressed that although she now enjoys a respectful relationship with her
current principal, she remembered how she felt while working with another principal:

If the principal is thinking about because he or she is a doctor and has to be acting totally
different and passing in front of you and don’t even say good morning to you or anything
like that… I mean a good morning doesn’t cost anything and makes you feel welcome to
a place. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

The paraeducators had varying perceptions regarding whether they were valued by the
school system. Although not every participant mentioned how valued they feel during the
interview, 36% explained that they received positive messages of their worth from principals,
teachers, and families. In contrast, the rushed nature of their evaluation processes that did not
include a formal observation requirement caused some paraeducators (36%) to feel undervalued,
and others (21%) specifically expressed that they did not feel respected in the school.

Feedback with Limited Value

Feedback with limited value was the second major theme that emerged. Hattie and Yates
(2015) define feedback as “information allowing a learner to reduce the gap between what is
evident currently and what could or should be the case” (p. 46). As described in literature
regarding employee appraisal, evaluation with feedback should lead to performance
improvement and should influence employment decisions (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson,
2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). Both of these purposes for appraisal require
ongoing and timely feedback so employees have the opportunity to correct performance
deficiencies before employment decisions are finalized (Grote, 2002). In addition, Klein (2011)
suggests giving frequent and timely feedback as supervisor behaviors that can lead to performance improvement.

Throughout the interviews with the paraeducators, the participants explained that they believed feedback was very important as it helped them to improve their performance. In fact, nine of the fourteen paraeducators (64%) talked about feedback, and in all of those cases, their focus was on performance improvement. Farr (1993) makes a distinction between the informal feedback a supervisor or colleague may provide during day-to-day interactions and the formal feedback that is part of the final performance appraisal. The paraeducators talked about both types of feedback. They also described memories regarding the timeliness and frequency of the verbal feedback they received and their experiences regarding the written feedback provided on evaluation documents.

Despite the paraeducators’ focus on performance improvement, their comments showed the majority of the paraeducators did not experience feedback in ways that supported their professional development. The feedback, therefore, had limited value. Six of the paraeducators (43%) spoke about understanding the purpose and need for feedback. According to Sandy, the purpose of evaluation feedback was “to see where we could either improve or where we’re doing well, just looking over what we’re doing right or wrong” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Nancy agreed, “I want to know that I'm doing my job right. I want to know if there's anything I need to change...the way I talk to the kids or anything like that” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Carrie was also eager to receive feedback to improve her performance: “For me, personally, I always want to know how it can be better...I always want to figure out ways that I can do my job better and to help the classroom be more productive” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Ann, too, wanted to receive feedback that would improve her performance: “I think it's good to be evaluated. It keeps you on
your toes. I do think that you’re able to learn different things from your own evaluation, which better helps students” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Interest in performance improvement was echoed by Beth as well:

I like it to be honest. Not just that I met or exceeded, I'd like to know in what way I was doing it [my work] the right way or in what way I was doing it the wrong way...I think it should be direct feedback from the supervisor or the principal, telling me exactly what I'm doing correctly and what exactly I could improve on. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Carolyn agreed, “Everybody needs to know, ‘Am I doing what you want me to do? Am I doing what’s required of me?’ If not, please tell me or discuss with me and I will address that” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Just as Grote (2002) and Klein (2011) suggest, the participants believed that ongoing and timely feedback was crucial to the improvement of their performance, and they spoke about the feedback that they received from teachers and from principals.

Although the District 3 teachers do not evaluate their paraeducators, they are invited to give input for evaluations. To illustrate this point, Tamara stated:

A lot of the principals will ask teacher input, and I think they have to in a way because they’re not in there. They’re not in the room, the principals, so they usually would like teacher feedback at how we do and how we’re doing. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Denise also acknowledged that “the teacher has some input into our evaluations,” and Wanda agreed: “The teacher that we work closest with does share his or her thoughts with the administrator to let them know what their daily observations are and give their input that way” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Kate concurred, describing her experience this way:

Initially, depending on the teacher that you work with, they give input...Then he [my principal] also may talk to other teachers at this program. He talks to other people...because I just don’t work with one teacher. I work with numerous teachers, so I guess it depends on who you are, for me it’s numerous teachers. Then he tries to get other input from them. (Interview, 9-29-2014)
According to Carolyn, teacher input was “pretty vital and more accurate than if or if not you were observed by the evaluator,” as the teacher has many opportunities to observe the paraeducator’s work (Interview, 9-29-2014).

However, all of the paraeducators who discussed this topic (50% of the total number) expressed that supervising teachers do not give paraeducators feedback that was timely or frequent. Audrey was concerned that this practice could lead to unfair evaluations, as was the case in her situation:

> It was totally based on what the teacher had to say, and I have to say there were a couple of conflicts with teachers here and there, so that’s not really fair. You’re getting a biased opinion, because [feedback] depends on how professional the person is…If you had a moment with a teacher and you didn’t see eye to eye, there’s no way to guarantee that…the information they give isn’t biased, because you have nothing to back [it] up. (Interview, 9-29-2014)

The paraeducators stated that they had also encountered negative comments in evaluations when feedback from the teachers had not been previously discussed with them and suggested that it should be the responsibility of the supervising teacher to share performance concerns with them in a timely fashion. Nancy recalled a time when a supervising teacher was not quickly forthcoming with important informal feedback, and she recounted her response with disappointment: “You should have talked to me about it first before you waited the rest of the year to then let it out at the end” (Interview, 10-10-2014). In this case, because the teacher did not provide timely informal feedback, the paraeducator felt that the formal feedback was unfair. Carolyn agreed:

> A lot of times, people are taken off guard, especially if there is a problem. You had a problem, nobody addressed it before. ‘Nobody’s talked to me about it, now you’re putting it in my evaluation, but we didn’t talk about it, and why is this the first I’m hearing of there being a problem?’ (Interview, 9-29-2014)
The paraeducators also described the feedback they received from principals. For example, Michaela was positive about the feedback she received from her principal: “I mean, she gives us good feedback. At least my experience with her. And she’s been really forthcoming” (Interview, 9-29-2014). In contrast, although Maria was glad her current principal provided her frequent informal feedback, she remembered that she rarely received feedback from a former supervisor (Interview, 10-10-2014). Carolyn explained the discrepancy by stating that the frequency of feedback principals provided to paraeducators varied from principal to principal. She felt that as long as the paraeducator was performing well, the evaluation conversation at some schools was the only time any type of feedback was received. To illustrate this, she stated the following about her principal: “He doesn’t talk to me unless there’s a problem” (Interview, 9-29-2014).

In contrast, Maria stated her principal was willing to reconsider a perceived problem when the principal included a negative comment in an evaluation and then deleted the comment after learning the teacher had never discussed this concern with her (Interview, 10-10-2014). Quinn, too, discussed this topic, although she did not have a specific example from her personal experience:

But I will tell you that if I thought something [on my evaluation] was going to be negative or I saw it on there, I think I would want to know ahead of time. I think that’s probably important, because this is something that comes out at the end of the year. If someone’s noticing something about you, it would be nice to be told. ‘Let’s talk about this. How can we make changes, how can we improve?’” (Interview, 10-10-2014)

As evidence of these concerns, the paraeducators described formal feedback with limited value when they discussed evaluation documents that lacked detailed and meaningful written comments, as most of the evaluations they brought to the interviews had few or no comments written in the designated comments spaces. Instead the principals simply gave ratings for areas
of performance without including examples or other written explanations. Denise stated that she would be able to tell a lot of thought was put into her evaluation if comments had been included, and Carrie, while judging the lack of time and effort that she felt the principals put into the evaluations, remarked:

Typically, not as much as I think needs to be done for the seriousness of the evaluation. I mean, I would like to see specifics rather than general. I would like just more examples of how your job knowledge is meeting the standards, or in other cases, needs improvement, doesn’t meet, or even exceeds. (Interview, 9-29-2014)

Audrey spoke extensively about her varying experiences regarding receiving specific formal feedback in the form of written comments on her evaluations. She was very positive about her most recent evaluation, believing that this evaluator had put time into carefully considering the comments. She stated, “Just knowing that she took time to think it over and take it [my evaluation] as seriously as she did any other professional here showed me that she respected me and our profession.” However, she was quite negative regarding her experiences with past evaluations that had been written by a different evaluator:

I looked back at past evaluations, and it really did trigger how unprofessional time was given to the process…The time it took to fill it out and the comments that were given and the little time you could see was put into it, that demeaned our profession. Two years in a row, it was almost cut and pasted, the comments. They would change slightly, but they said the same thing, so it just proved…to me that really we weren’t being taken seriously. The evaluation process for us wasn’t taken seriously, it was just something they had to do. They didn’t, in my mind, take it seriously to say, ‘You are a professional, we want to really commend your strengths and we would like to help you with your weaknesses…’ Getting it done was their end goal, it wasn’t the process…This is from 2010, and this has absolutely no comments whatsoever. (Interview, 9-29-2014)

In summary, because the paraeducators in District 3 identified a link between feedback and performance improvement, they also believed that informal feedback should be frequent and provided in a timely manner. However, the paraeducators were concerned that they did not receive frequent, purposeful, or timely informal feedback from the educators who contributed to
their evaluations. In addition, they believed that receiving evaluations without formal feedback in the form of specific comments about areas of performance and explanations about how performance could be improved was an indication the principals rushed through the process. The paraeducators may have believed that the lack of clarity around expectations for providing feedback should be a concern for the organization, as this lack of clarity was an indicator that they were not expected to improve through the evaluation process.

Lack of Clarity Regarding Purpose of Evaluations

A third and final theme of subquestion 1 emerged from the data: lack of clarity regarding purpose of evaluations. According to the appraisal literature, employee evaluations should support organizations by helping employees improve their performance and by signaling employment decisions such as promotion, transfer, and dismissal (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). However, the data collected through this study suggest that paraeducator evaluations do not meet these purposes. Data showed that the evaluations did not significantly affect employee performance or employment decisions in District 3. While the District 3 evaluation form was standardized, none of the evaluation documents indicated the purpose for paraeducator evaluation.

Throughout the interviews, eight of the fourteen paraeducators (57%) explained that they believed the evaluations should help them improve. For example, Audrey stated that the purpose of evaluation was to “help support you in those areas that you struggle” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Carolyn added, “Everybody needs to know, ‘Am I doing what you want me to do? Am I doing what's required of me?’ If not, please tell me or discuss with me and I will address that” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Ann concurred, asserting, “I do think that they [evaluations] should be
held because I think people can always improve” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Nancy echoed Carolyn and Ann when she stated:

It [evaluation] means a lot. I want to know that I'm doing my job right. I want to know if there's anything I need to change about...The way I talk to the kids, or anything like that. If there's certain ways you want me to word things, I like to know if there's things that you need me to change or vice versa, whatever the situation is. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Wanda was specific about how an evaluation could help her improve her performance when she stated:

It [evaluation] just reaffirms either that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, and if there's areas that I need to improve upon, lets me know what I need to change or modify. That's it. I see that pretty much is the reason for the evaluation, in my opinion, is that it lets me know what I'm doing right, keep doing that. Then if there's something that I need to be concerned about or something that needs attention, lets me know what that is too. It helps me decide...For instance, this year, we're starting something new where we're given the opportunities to do PDs [professional development] on our own, which count. We have to do 19.5 hours. Looking at maybe a prior evaluation, I can say, 'I need to improve this skill or that, whatever.' I can then look at the PDs that are being offered and tailor those to what I need to do based on my evaluation. If I have to work on skills that would help a student in the classroom, I can take a couple of classes, whether its computer related or whatever, that would help me in that direction. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

However, although the paraeducators hypothesized that evaluations should help them to improve their performance, ten of them (71%) also explained that, in their own experiences, they had not improved as a result of the evaluations. Specifically, the paraeducators were asked a question about their own performance in relation to a completed evaluation they brought to the interview: “What has been the impact of this evaluation on your work as a paraeducator?” (see Appendix A). Six of the fourteen paraeducators (43%) explained that their own performances were not affected by the evaluation because they believed they were already doing what was expected. For instance, Carolyn said, “I’m pretty hard on myself. I mean, I think I work really hard. Would it affect me one way or the other? Not particularly because I’m still going to basically do what I think is the best and that’s just the kind of work ethic that I have” (Interview,
9-29-2014). Ann agreed: “I don’t think it [the evaluation] had an impact because I do feel that I take this job to heart, probably too much. I do the best that I can, and I’m not afraid to ask for help if I think I need it” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Quinn said, “It [evaluation] makes me want to continue to do a good job because somebody’s recognizing that” (Interview, 10-10-2014). When asked if an evaluation had affected her performance, Denise answered, “No, because like I said, I really do try to do the best that I can, so I really can’t do better than that” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Kate also did not feel the evaluations affected her performance: “I know personally that I can do my job to my ability” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Even Wanda, who had received negative feedback on an evaluation, felt that her performance did not change after that evaluation:

I think I still did my job the way I've always done it and tried to do my very best for the students, for the teachers that I was working with. I was being more cautious, but I don't think I was really changing the way I was doing my job. (Interview, 10-10-2014)

Four more paraeducators (29%) agreed that their performance had not improved due to evaluation. Both Carrie and Beth answered with a simple, “No,” when asked if an evaluation had ever changed performance (Interviews, 9-29-2014 and 10-10-2014), and Tamara explained that her performance was not likely to improve due to an evaluation because she did not feel that her evaluations indicated a need for improvement: “I don't believe so because nothing said I didn't meet standards” (Interview, 10-10-2014). So Tamara seemed to believe that as long as her evaluation did not indicate any specific problem areas, then there was no reason to improve in any way. This is likely an indication that she has not participated in growth-oriented conversations with her evaluators, since if she had, perhaps she would understand that all employees can improve.
Audrey explained that evaluations did not change her performance, and she showed her disdain for the process as she answered:

They're meaningless. You walk away and you go, ‘They're meaningless.’ It was less than a minute long. That was probably the time it took to put the comments on…especially the second time when you read that, probably…It's meaningless, but as much as that may be meaningless, what I do and how I feel about my job is not. It wouldn't affect how I perform, it just makes me not respect the process of the evaluation, but my job would never change because of it. (Interview, 9-29-2014)

Only three paraeducators (21%) commented that evaluations could affect performance.

For instance, Sandy stated, “It [evaluation] makes me I think try harder. Yes, I got a good review, but I feel like I have to keep learning and moving with the times of how education is changing. It does change” (Interview, 9-29-2014). Maria answered, “Most of the time” (Interview, 10-10-2014), when asked if receiving feedback on an evaluation helped her.

However, Michaela was the only paraeducator who recalled a specific evaluation experience that she believed had helped her improve her performance. She explained that she needed to improve her communication with a teacher and that she felt she was able to do that after “just looking at it from somebody else’s point of view” (Interview, 9-29-2014).

Audrey, who did not believe that the evaluations in their current state could result in performance improvement, suggested that evaluations could result in performance improvement if specific plans were created to support growth areas:

If there's somewhere that you struggle, we want to help support you in those areas that you struggle because that's part of it too. Not everything's all rosy. There are areas that always need to be worked on, so it would be nice if there was some kind of plan, and we tried to get this in there too for evaluations, that it's not just saying, ‘Oh, well, here, we see you struggle with this and you need to work on it.’ Let's have a plan to help you get better in that area. (Interview, 9-29-2014)

Thus, the data show that while the paraeducators in Millstone School District 3 hypothesized that the intent of evaluation was performance improvement, they did not believe
they had improved due to appraisals. Many of the paraeducators believed they already work so hard they cannot or do not need to grow professionally, revealing a lack of distinction between effort and excellence. This misunderstanding may be an indication that the paraeducators rarely, or perhaps never, engage in reflective dialogue with their evaluators about how they might improve. Such conversations could help the paraeducators see many ways to grow that are related to how they are working rather than how hard they are working.

Similarly, although the literature shows that evaluations should affect employment decisions such as promotion, transfer, or dismissal (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986), the findings of this research suggest that paraeducator employment decisions are not affected by evaluations in District 3. Very few paraeducators (21%) brought up employment decision concepts when asked what evaluation means to them or their work. If employment decisions were linked to paraeducator evaluations in District 3, it is likely that some of the paraeducators would have acknowledged or discussed the relationship between promotion, transfer, or dismissal and evaluation.

Audrey noted that she was unsure of how evaluations affect employment decisions:

I don't know how much they actually use these…I just know I'm evaluated. It goes in my file. I think it would probably be an issue if there were issues with me, if this would be brought out. Otherwise, I think you're just evaluated and… I think it's just kind of, it's done, it's put away if there's no problems, and it's just in there in your file, but if, say, I wanted to pursue a different job in the district or something, then they might come into play. I don't know. I've never had to do that so I'm not sure how much these impact me. I'm not really sure. (Interview 9-29-2014)

Although they did not indicate a direct link between their evaluation ratings and employment, two paraeducators (14%) discussed the possible consequences of speaking up about their appraisals. For instance, in reference to a colleague’s evaluation experience, Tamara stated, “It wasn’t that it was such a bad review that it would affect her job. She wasn’t getting fired or
anything. She decided to just let it go because the more ruckus you make, then they might get rid of you” (Interview, 10-10-2014). Also, Denise spoke about her own experience regarding not agreeing with an evaluation, explaining that she did not dispute the evaluation because “people who rock the boat tend not to be in the district anymore” (Interview, 10-10-2014). When asked for more information to substantiate this statement, Denise claimed, “We’ve seen it go on,” but she declined to comment any further (Interview, 10-10-2014).

However, Denise contradicted herself when she indicated that she did not believe the evaluations affect a paraeducator’s work life: “I don’t really think it means all that much because nothing is based on that. You’re not going to get a raise based on your evaluation. You’re not going to get really even in trouble for your evaluation. I don’t think administration cares all that much about it” (Interview, 10-10-2014).

Although the research on paraeducators indicates that paraeducators make up a large employee group (Hampden-Thompson, Diehl, & Kinukawa, 2007) important to the functioning of schools (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Etscheidt, 2005; French, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1997; Moshoyannis, Pickett, & Granick, 1999; Rubin, 1994), the paraeducators in District 3 described a process that was applied inconsistently, lacked meaningful feedback, did not lead to performance improvement, and seemed not to be used to support employment decisions. The paraeducators seemed to be wondering why they were even evaluated.

**Research Subquestion 1 Overview**

Throughout the interviews, the paraeducators described evaluation experiences that lacked consistency in the areas of observations and evaluation meetings. While some paraeducators remembered being observed by their evaluators, other paraeducators did not
believe they had been observed by the administrators evaluating them. Also, some paraeducators described being able to discuss their own growth or at least ask questions during evaluation meetings, whereas other paraeducators did not remember receiving opportunities to discuss their evaluations and their own professional growth. In addition, the paraeducators had varying opinions regarding the extent to which they were valued by the school system: some felt valued by the administrators and teachers and some perceived they were not respected by members of the school community; in some cases, they did not feel valued due to their evaluation experiences. The paraeducators also described receiving infrequent informal feedback and non-specific formal feedback, and thus most of their experiences indicated that feedback did not support their professional development, which should be a concern for the school organization as a whole. In addition, the data collected through the paraeducator interviews indicated that neither of the two important purposes for employee appraisal (performance improvement and employment decisions) were met by the paraeducator evaluations in District 3.

Research Subquestion 2
How do principals perceive their experiences of participating in paraeducator evaluation?

Six principals in District 3 were interviewed about their experiences participating in paraeducator evaluation. Five themes emerged from the principals’ data for Research Subquestion 2: Inconsistencies in the Paraeducator Evaluation Process, Varying Perceptions of Evaluation Conferences, Lack of Clarity Regarding Purpose of Evaluations, Limited Preparation for Evaluating Paraeducators, and Valuing Paraeducators.
Like the paraeducators, the principals described a wide variety of experiences in the paraeducator evaluation process. Inconsistencies were found among the principals in relation to their observations and feedback for paraeducators.

Inconsistencies Regarding Observations

Direct observation of performance is recommended in employee appraisal literature (Ilgen, 1983; McKirchy, 1998; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995) and in the literature that specifically surrounds paraeducator evaluation (French, 2003; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Watkinson, 2008). Neither the collective bargaining agreement (Appendix B) nor the paraeducator evaluation instrument (Appendix C) identified a requirement for principals in District 3 to collect evidence of paraeducators’ performance through observations, and thus the practices in this area varied from one principal to another. One principal (17%) did not mention paraeducator observations at all during the interviews. However, the others (83%) spoke about observation practices that varied widely, ranging from visits to classrooms specifically intended for paraeducator observation to observations that occurred as part of the principals’ regular visits to the classroom to vague references of seeing paraeducators at work.

Of the six principals interviewed for this study, George and Steven seemed to be the most intentional about collecting data through performance observations. George stated that he might observe a paraeducator during a full 42-minute middle school period (Interview, 9-22-2014), and Steven explained that he chose one time each year to go into a classroom specifically to observe a paraeducator. He said this observation occurred right before the written evaluation and that he
gave the paraeducator feedback about the observation during the evaluation meeting. He clarified, “I call it a formal observation because they know that I’m there to observe them. But it’s not formal in the sense…there is nothing that they plan. They do get ready, but they’re not required to plan” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Later in the interview, Steven suggested an improvement to the process: “I think it would be more beneficial to do that type of pre-conference, observation, and conference” (Interview, 9-22-2014). He felt it would be more similar to the procedure for formally observing teachers, which is structured according to Illinois state law (the Performance Evaluation Reform Act 2010). However, neither this law nor any other federal or state law requires observation as part of the evaluation process for paraeducators in Illinois.

Four principals (67%) talked about observing paraeducators in a less formal way. For example, although George described intentional observation of the paraeducators, he also explained, “I could come in and watch the interaction that is going on between the educator and the kids and the educator and the teacher” (Interview, 9-22-2014). When asked if he gave written feedback to the paraeducator after such an observation, he answered, “No, now that you say that, I haven’t...because that's not part of the process, that's not part of the contract, so no we don't do that in a piece of paper form.” However, when asked if he gave oral feedback after such an observation, he said that he did (Interview, 9-22-2014).

Marcus also talked about observing performance when he stated:

What I’m looking for...is how do they work with the students, how do they work with the teacher, how much do they need for training, are they a quick study, do they get the ball rolling, do they – in essence – act like another instructional person in the classroom. (Interview, 9-22-2014)
Suzanne explained that although she did not do formal observations, she noticed what the paraeducators were doing while she was walking about the school and visiting classrooms and documented this information. She said the notes she collected were used as data for the evaluation at the end of the year. She considered the observations to be informal:

I haven’t done anything formalized like with the teachers and you do the pre-conference, the formal observation, the post, but… I do walk-throughs every day. There are definitely times when we’re in the classrooms with the paraeducators and it’s definitely more informal. There’s nothing written that I have done. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Grace also talked about leaving “little notes in their mailbox” when she saw “positive things happening,” thus implying that she had opportunities to see her paraeducators at work.

Two of the principals (33%) discussed the importance of basing evaluations on evidence. For example, Grace was certain her paraeducator evaluations reflected the evidence she collected throughout the year:

It’s really important for me to have evidence as to why, what does it mean for someone to be an Exceeds? What does it mean to Meet? What does it mean to Not Meet? I don’t put this in the evaluation, but on my own in my little notebook that I have for notes. I have evidence of why individuals fall into each category in each factor…I’ve collected evidence over time…If someone were to ask, “Why am I in Needs Improvement?” first of all, I tell them if they get a Needs Improvement, here’s specifically why…As I’m going through each factor with them, I do give them some evidence and some examples of why they are an Exceeds or why they are a Needs Improvement…I feel that I have evidence to support the rating that they are receiving. I always feel really comfortable with those evaluations. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

In contrast, Karen, who did not speak about observations, was unsure if she could collect evidence to support the ratings she knew she needed to provide: “I don't know if I'd know what the evidence would look like if I saw it” (Interview, 9-22-2014).

Like the paraeducators, the principals described inconsistent practices regarding gathering evidence for evaluations through observations. Two principals (33%) said they were intentional about observing paraeducator performance, four (67%) spoke about informal
observations, one of whom observed paraeducators both formally and informally. One principal did not discuss observation at all. The fact that the requirements of the evaluation process are unclear may lead to this inconsistency from evaluator to evaluator.

Inconsistencies Regarding Feedback

Four of the six principals (66%) recurrently spoke about feedback in the interviews. However, the principals’ comments indicated inconsistencies regarding their beliefs surrounding the purpose of feedback, their description of the frequency with which they provided feedback, and their perceptions of the value of the feedback paraeducators received from the teachers.

Three of the principals (50%) discussed feedback when asked, “What do you think paraeducator evaluations mean to the paraeducators,” and through their comments they displayed discrepant views of the purpose of feedback. For example, Karen saw giving feedback as an opportunity to help paraeducators improve: “It’s an opportunity for them to get feedback on their job. I think they crave that; I think they want to know how they’re doing and if there’s anything that people want them to do differently” (Interview, 9-22-2014). In contrast, Grace did not discuss feedback in relation to performance improvement. Instead she described feedback as a tool for showing the paraeducators they were valued:

It feels good to be able to share such positive feedback with an individual who works hard and who is in the role for the right reasons. I would say what I remember most is she was appreciative. She just felt happy that she was being, that all of those little details, those things that she does every single day are being recognized and that someone knows that all of the little things, not little things, but all of the things little and big that she does to impact students. I think that's walking away just a very positive feeling. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

George also talked about giving feedback as a method for letting paraeducators know they were valued: “It [the evaluation] gives them a structure that ensures some feedback, which
is good...I think it’s a sign of value to them...It guarantees conversations are going to happen and that’s what we want to happen here” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Thus, George suggested that without the “guarantee” of evaluation, the paraeducators might not receive feedback at all, indicating a lack of informal feedback given through the day-to-day interactions between the employee and the supervisor (Farr, 1993). Such informal feedback cannot occur when the paraeducators and principals simply do not communicate outside of the formal evaluation process. A lack of interaction between paraeducators and their supervisors was supported by at least one of the paraeducators, as Maria’s memories of a principal “passing in front of you and don’t even say good morning or anything like that” (Interview, 10-10-2014) suggested that she did not communicate with her supervisor frequently.

Three of the six principal participants (50%) talked about the importance of providing timely feedback. Grace explained that she provides both positive and negative feedback to her paraeducators all year long:

I would never want to have surprises…When I see positive things happening, I leave little notes in their mailboxes on stationery. If I have a concern, I’m not going to wait for an evaluation to communicate that information…nothing on here should be a surprise. This is just kind of the culmination of the different conversations that we had throughout the year…Nothing that we discuss on this day should at all be a surprise. Whether it’s a fantastic, excellent evaluation or whether it’s a little bit more difficult...I think it’s really important we don't wait until an evaluation to give people feedback. Right? (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Here, Grace seemed to be referencing the feedback given when she was observing employee performance.

George agreed that giving timely feedback is important and referred to the frequent nature of informal feedback: “Yes, well, shame on us if we're not getting appropriate feedback, like day-to-day, just sort of anecdotal things. But clearly, if there's stuff going on and we need to
address, we'll talk to them when it happens” (Interview, 9-22-2014). However, Karen spoke about feedback in a different way, focusing her comments on the regret she felt regarding how little feedback she gave to high performers:

The people who get more of my time are the ones who aren’t doing a very good job. That’s unfortunate, but it’s the reality of my life as a principal…If you’re a good paraprofessional, you get almost zero of my time, because I’m not worried about you, and you’re doing the things I want you to do. From an evaluation feedback perspective, that doesn't necessarily…I think it is out of whack for what an evaluation’s supposed to do. They don't get very much of my time. It's unfortunate the ones that get my time are the ones who aren't doing a good job. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Whether discussing formal or informal feedback, the principals’ comments displayed inconsistencies regarding provision of feedback to paraeducators.

The principals were also inconsistent regarding the extent to which they relied on and used evaluative feedback from teachers. Teachers in District 3 were invited to provide input for paraeducator evaluation, and three of the principals (50%) believed that the input was valuable because it made the evaluations more credible. For example, George explained that the information he could gather by observing a paraeducator was not “going to be nearly as robust” as the information the supervising teacher would share with him (Interview, 9-22-2014). Steven agreed that the teachers are more familiar with a paraeducator’s performance than he would be, so he noted, “I will ask for feedback from the teacher because I don't know as much as the teacher. I assume that teachers have more knowledge in that case.” He felt so strongly that teacher input was vital that he suggested a revised process in which teachers would be the paraeducators’ evaluators:

I don’t see my assistants working every day with students…So I don’t know how much this [evaluation] means to them. I think if the teachers evaluated them…I would assume that they would appreciate the feedback more because the teachers are with them all that time…Because of our process, I don’t have all their information. (Interview, 9-22-2014)
 Similarly, Grace felt that including teacher feedback supported her comments and ratings:

They [paraeducators] know that every year I do always ask for feedback from others. I don't share what is exactly written. I don’t share what is turned in to me. When I am talking in the evaluation notes, I do say that 'this is feedback that one of your colleagues has provided me with. Here is some information they shared and I think it's important for you to know as a paraeducator that this is not just what I see happening, but this is also feedback that your colleagues are giving you as well.’ Again, it's kind of a collaborative evaluation that I am sharing with them. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Per the collective bargaining agreement (Appendix B), the principals, not teachers, supervise the paraeducators and, thus, are tasked with the responsibility of evaluating them. However, some of the principals did not seem to feel it was important to have firsthand knowledge of the performance levels of these employees. This may be an indication of the low priority the principals placed on paraeducator evaluation. In fact, only one of the six principals (16%), Karen, expressed regret that she did not have more data about paraeducator performance that she collected herself:

And a lot of it [data] I'm getting secondhand from classroom teachers. I think that that makes it...I don't think that my direct observation data is as strong. I think that that makes the information that I'm giving them different, because I'm not the one who...I might be sharing information that classroom teachers gave me, and I usually ask clarifying questions if I don't understand what...especially if it's a concern that's been listed; I need to make sure I understand this. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

The principals also spoke about the teachers not sharing feedback directly with the paraeducators. For example, George stated, “We try to let the teachers know it's in their best interest to be honest with us, so that we can share information if they're not doing it themselves” (Interview, 9-22-2014). This topic seemed to be important to Karen, as she spoke about it quite extensively, and while some of her principal colleagues found the teacher feedback very valuable, she found it less useful for evaluation because the teachers avoided sharing negative
feedback with paraeducators. Karen explained that she would not provide negative feedback in an evaluation if the teacher had not already shared the concern with the paraeducator:

If there's something that shows up on the opportunities for improvement, I always ask the classroom teacher, ‘Have you talked to them about this yet? If you haven't talked to them about this yet, I'm not putting it in writing, because I don't think that's fair.’ I'll tell them I'll have a conversation with them about it, but it's not going to show up in writing. I'm like, ‘I understand that this has been bothering you all year, but you never said anything; this isn't the venue. The evaluation isn't the venue, then, for this conversation.'

Karen proposed the following explanation regarding why teachers avoided speaking with paraeducators about performance concerns:

A lot of [the teachers], I think they don’t want to do that. They don’t want…to make people feel bad. They worry about, ‘If I say something difficult, it’s going to make our working relationship difficult,’...I have some teachers who really, really avoid conflict. It makes them so uncomfortable.

She then referenced the informal training she provided supervising teachers, explaining that she engages in conversations with teachers about the importance of giving direct feedback: “I often feel like, okay, I’m having this conversations with another adult about how to have a conversation with another adult, which is fine, that’s my job, and I get it, but I feel that’s a whole piece of this evaluation system that makes it a little bit more awkward” (Interview, 9-22-2014).

While George, Steven, and Grace welcomed the feedback they received from the teachers for the paraeducators’ evaluations, Karen was considerably more cautious about including information from teachers by first confirming that the teachers had already shared the feedback with the paraeducators. It is noted that although the District 3 paraeducator evaluation document has a checkbox to indicate whether teacher input was received for the evaluation, principals are not required to utilize such input. Nonetheless, the fact that sometimes principals relied heavily on teacher input and sometimes they did not include it at all is another indicator that principals...
used processes that were inconsistent from administrator to administrator when they were evaluating paraeducators.

**Varying Perceptions Regarding Evaluation Meetings**

When describing the content and contexts of the final evaluation meetings, the principals discussed the evidence provided to the paraeducators in support of their ratings, opportunities for paraeducators to develop professionally through reflection, and the general length of the evaluation meetings.

Regarding discussion about evidence for the evaluations, three of the principals (50%) explained that they discussed each statement or rating in the evaluation. For example, Grace stated:

> We sit down and we walk through each piece, each statement in the evaluation. We walk through any narrative comments. I let them know that if they have questions and after they further review the document if they have any further questions or concerns they can always talk with me about that. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Suzanne described a similar process:

> I typically start out with how they think their year had gone and if there was anything they needed support with that they didn’t get and just get a sense for how they felt everything went, and then we’ll go through it step by step. I’ll talk to some length about each of the factors and let them know why that exceeds standards or why they met standards or if they have specific comments about them going above and beyond… Hopefully they would see it’s a two-way communication. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Steven did the same:

> They typically have the form at that moment, so we go through each area. We talk about why I rated them on each particular box and where some of the...We talk about areas for growth, which usually are in the comments box. That’s a way to justify or to explain how or why they were rated a certain level. (Interview, 9-22-2014)
However, although Steven endeavored to be clear with the paraeducators about the reasons for the ratings, he regretted that he did not have a great deal of specific feedback to give. He felt this was because he had not formally observed the paraeducators and explained:

But there’s really no specific feedback on the work with students…I try to give them feedback about the things that I’ve seen generally but…the post-conference doesn’t allow for them to really [receive feedback]…because we’re not focusing on one observation to explain what we’re doing and to justify what we’re doing. I think that’s my criticism about this. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Half of the principals specifically mentioned giving paraeducators the chance to reflect on growth and performance as a part of the evaluation meeting process. For instance, Marcus clarified that he filled out the evaluation document while meeting with the paraeducators instead of coming to meetings with completed documents, thus from his perspective giving the paraeducators a chance to share their own thinking about their progress before completing the process (Interview, 9-22-2014). Karen used a different method, explaining that she offered paraeducators the opportunity for a second meeting if they needed time to reflect (Interview, 9-22-2014). Steven also referred to reflection when he compared these meetings to the evaluation meetings he had with teachers:

I usually ask them to reflect. That’s usually the first step, and I do that with teachers and paraeducators. I think that’s where I got it from, teachers, because I feel like it’s important for them to reflect, so I can encourage questions. I ask them about specific areas that I want them to think about. Then I give them my opinion about that. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Grace, on the other hand, did not feel her paraeducators had opportunities to reflect aloud during evaluation meetings: “Again, even when it's positive, it's more of...It's not much of a collaboration or conversation. It's more of me giving some feedback, sharing things, and then...that's pretty much about it” (Interview, 9-22-2014).
In addition to the content of the evaluation meetings, the principals also discussed the length of the meetings. All four of the principal participants who spoke about this topic (67%) described meetings of about 20 minutes. Suzanne stated, “It depends how much of a talker the para is, but I would say between 15 to 30 minutes is typical” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Steven said, “Twenty minutes; yeah, about 20 minutes” (Interview, 9-22-2014), and George explained that meetings were brief because he shared feedback with paraeducators throughout the school year:

Fifteen to 20 minutes. Depending on how long they take. Also honestly, it would be the same with my teachers, so that's not such a big difference, we try to operate on a no-surprises concept. There's generally not, we don't need to talk for 45 minutes about things we've already been talking about. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Karen took an opposite view, showing that she regretted the short length of the meetings:

I try to make it meaningful, but I'm not sure that it always is because I think it's always a little bit rushed… I do think that the process is somewhat rushed. It's a short meeting; I think we meet for 15, 20 minutes, which is not a lot of time when you're giving somebody feedback over the course of their year's work. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

The principals’ comments about the length of the meetings and their perceptions of the paraeducators’ opportunities to discuss the evidence provided in their evaluations as well as to reflect on their own progress differed from the information offered by the paraeducators in their interviews. These discrepancies will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Lack of Clarity Regarding Purpose of Evaluations

A review of literature shows that the employee appraisal process should support organizations by helping employees improve their performance and by signaling employment decisions such as promotion, transfer, and dismissal (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). However, even though the principals discussed performance improvement in relation to paraeducator evaluation, they differed in their
perceptions of the need for and outcomes of performance improvement as a result of the evaluation, and their comments about evaluation in relation to employment decisions were very brief.

Two of the principals (33%) specified that they believed evaluation was simply a way of checking that the paraeducators were fulfilling the requirements of their position. For example, Karen explained:

I think what it [evaluation] means to me is an opportunity to give a paraprofessional feedback in terms of what their job role is, and...I think all evaluations should be highlighting what their strengths are, because I don't think people often get that feedback on a regular basis. I'm often looking for the things that they're doing well, and so then I can communicate that to them. Then if there's a couple things I would like to have them work on that might advance their work with children, that's the other piece. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Suzanne agreed about the meaning of evaluation by saying, “Are they doing what we have them here to do? Are the administrators supporting them in what they need as well? Just looking at the whole process and are things going the way they should be going and does there need to be improvement in any area” (Interview, 9-22-2014).

Three other principals (50%) talked about paraeducators who were already high performing, noting that in each of these cases, the principals did not feel further improvement was needed. Suzanne remembered, “She was just so spectacular and she did continue to rise up to that level. I definitely did not see a decline in performance, but just that same consistency” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Karen indicated that some paraeducators are intrinsically motivated and do not need the external motivation of an evaluation to improve: “She’s going to be good whether I tell her she’s good or not. Really, she is, she’s just that type of person. It’s not okay for her to show up to work and not do a good job” (Interview, 9-22-2014). George was sure that he had never worked with a paraeducator who had needed to improve performance: “As God as my
witness we haven't had one that was difficult to write. We haven't had anybody we've needed to move out. We haven't had anybody we've really needed to change directionally” (Interview, 9-22-2014).

On the other hand, three of the principals (50%) indicated that the work of the paraeducators who performed poorly either did not improve due to evaluation or that the paraeducators did not maintain the positive changes they had made after an evaluation. For example, Suzanne talked about a paraeducator who was competent in some areas but did not seem to be interested in growing or learning new skills. This paraeducator was still rated as meeting expectations, but Suzanne told her that some professional growth was expected and gave her specific steps and explained needed adjustments to her work. The paraeducator agreed to make those changes. However, Suzanne did not witness these performance changes after the evaluation. Suzanne also discussed another paraeducator with performance concerns. When asked if the paraeducator’s performance had changed after the evaluation, Suzanne remarked:

For a little bit when she came back it did, but then she went back to the same routine and, unfortunately, we went through that process again. Throughout the year unfortunately there were those highs and lows where things would improve for a short period of time, but then she would revert back to her natural way of doing things. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Grace also evaluated a low-performing paraeducator:

When we go through her quality of work, completion of all work related, this position is done in a thorough and accurate manner, that was an area that needed improvement. The description is, ‘Work is often inconsistent and requires checking for accuracy.’ I went through and gave her some examples. Again, she knew that her quality of work was not what we all believed that we thought that she could do, but she wasn't really motivated and she wasn't really interested in changing her quality of work. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

When asked if the paraeducator’s performance changed in any way in response to the evaluation, Grace answered, “I would say probably for the next week. We all saw some of those old habits return” (Interview, 9-22-2014).
Karen recounted a similar experience. She worked with a paraeducator who had difficulty getting along with other adults. She said she discussed this with the paraeducator whenever concerns arose over the years and included the information in an evaluation:

She didn't argue the evaluation, and I wrote right in the evaluation, ‘The ratings were reflective of the letter of reprimand and conversations.’ I wrote the dates of all of those in there. Her behavior got better, but I still had...Last year, it got better for a year. There was nothing for a whole year, I had no nothing, and then last year I had to talk to her again about something that she...It was just hard for her. She didn't always use good judgment in terms of if she thought somebody should be doing something differently. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Thus, although Karen addressed the issue through continuing feedback and as a part of an evaluation process, she did not see lasting change in the paraeducator’s performance.

Karen also shared a story about a second paraeducator. In this case, the paraeducator had difficulty adjusting to new performance expectations. Again, as far as Karen knew, the paraeducator’s performance did not improve:

Unfortunately, I only worked with her on that for a year, and then she got transferred...Then somebody else had to continue that work in terms of...I think they worked through the remediation process and released her, so that probably would have been what I would've had to do if she stayed. She just wasn't a good fit for long. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Only one principal, Marcus, recalled paraeducator performance improving in a lasting way after an evaluation. He remembered difficult conversations with a paraeducator who did not agree with philosophical changes in the special education department. Those conversations occurred as part of the evaluation process and eventually resulted in an altered attitude. Marcus also shared a second story of a paraeducator’s performance improving:

She’s always coming late. She's leaving early...She did an okay job in the classroom; the areas that I have a concern, like I said, were generally more before or after school, taking too long over lunch, those kinds of things. I was going to give her an average rating in that category with opportunities to grow. I ended up dropping it lower because when I was talking to her during our conference, it feels like everything was nonchalance, like it
was being blown away. ‘It's not a big deal. You're making too much of this.’ I told her, ‘It's an important deal. I'm not the only one that notices. It helps with credibility with the staff.’ I put my own situation in it. ‘Would you expect me to leave five minutes earlier and things like that.’ ‘Yeah, I get it. I just don’t think it's a very big deal.’ ‘It is a big deal. I really hope over the next three or four months that you can improve upon that because of the expectations that we have for all of our paraprofessionals and all our professionals.’ She dropped in rating in that category. She's retained. She's still doing the position, but I think she got the message. It wasn't the first time I had told her. It just happened to be the conference time. It improved quite a bit after that actually. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

In the case of this principal and paraeducator, the employee did not take the supervisor’s concerns seriously until the principal was directive about a needed change in behavior, and this may be an indication that evaluations are more likely to result in performance improvement when they accurately describe the levels of performance.

Grace explained the relationship between evaluation and performance improvement in this way:

This [evaluation] is just a culmination of things that happened all year long. I don’t think that…sitting down and having this formal meeting and giving feedback at this main meeting…causes a change in performance. I think it’s all the things that we do or don’t do leading up to this point. That’s what causes change…in my opinion. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Two principals (33%) were especially critical of the evaluation process. First, Steven stated, “I think this is just a formality, and I don't know how much my paraeducators get out of this.” Along with suggesting goal setting, he referred to a formal observation process: “I think it would be more beneficial to do that type of pre-conference observation and conference.” Later, when asked how evaluating paraeducators makes him feel, Steven answered:

Like a task that needs to be done. It doesn't feel that I'm doing anything to make a difference. That's what principals are here for. When I meet with teachers and we set goals, I'm passionate about that. When I meet with any of my assistants, it's just like, oh, I have to get it done. (Interview, 9-22-2014)
Marcus, too, compared the process to teacher evaluation and stated that the paraeducator evaluation process is not particularly meaningful: “I wish it meant more, honestly.” Later, he stated:

I feel like sometimes it's a little bit of just a process. It's not as meaningful as I would want it to be. But no excuse, I mean, you need to try to make it a little bit more meaningful. I do try to provide them good feedback but sometimes I feel like it's just a process. That being from the paras themselves, they’ve got to go through the motions here and from possibly the principals as well. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

To improve the evaluation process, Steven suggested, “We should set goals for what we want them to work on…Like the observation should focus on that goal for growth” (Interview, 9-22-2014), paralleling Meyer et al. (1965), who found that the supervisor and employee working together to set goals can lead to superior results. Nemeroff and Cosentino’s (1979) research suggested that setting goals when receiving feedback has a positive effect on an employee’s motivation to improve performance as well as the employee’s perception of the overall success of the appraisal process. However, the principals in the current study seemed frustrated by a process they found meaningless and unlikely to effect change, either because there was not a need for change or because of ineffectiveness of the process. Therefore, it is not surprising the paraeducators also did not feel engaged in an appraisal process that caused them to grow professionally, as they took their signals from their supervisors.

Research (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007) also suggests that appraisals should lead to employment decisions such as promotion, transfer, and dismissal. However, the principals’ comments about employment decisions in relation to evaluations were very brief, and none seemed to have any direct experience with evaluations impacting employment decisions. For example, when Marcus spoke about a paraeducator who had received a poor evaluation, he commented, “She's retained. She's still
doing the position,” noting the lack of consequences in a poor evaluation (Interview, 9-22-2014). Karen also remembered something she thought occurred after a paraeducator was transferred out of the school: “I think they worked through the remediation process and released her” (Interview, 9-22-2014).

If the evaluations are to result in performance improvement, the value of the evaluations must first be expressed by the supervisors through direct performance observation, useful feedback, and the initiation of regular opportunities for paraeducators to reflect on their performance and set goals. However, the purposes of paraeducator evaluation in District 3 were unclear, as the principals did not seem to believe that paraeducators frequently improved as a result of being evaluated nor did they have definitive knowledge that employment decisions were based on evaluations. If the evaluations met neither of these important purposes, why were principals and paraeducators engaging in this activity?

**Limited Preparation for Evaluating Paraeducators**

Evaluation training can help managers avoid appraisal errors, can increase evaluator confidence, and can support managers in writing fair appraisals and conducting effective appraisal interviews (Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Roberts, 1998; Sims, 1998; Woehr & Huffcuff, 1994). Grote (2002) recommended that organizations provide managers with a formal appraisal training program prior to evaluating employees, create informational materials about the appraisal process for managers, and provide opportunities for managers to review the process through annual training.

However, despite the importance of evaluator training, the findings showed that the principals in District 3 have received very limited training to evaluate paraeducators. Only two
principals (33%) talked about meetings during which they discussed paraeducator evaluation with the Associate Superintendent for Human Resources. Grace said that 30 minutes of every administrative meeting are set aside for discussion about evaluation processes; however, she noted that most of the time was spent talking about teacher evaluation:

During those meetings, sometimes we'll talk about, the majority of the time we'll talk about evaluation for certified staff, but we will spend time talking about evaluation for classified staff. I don't know if I'd necessarily call that training but we do have conversations as principals. Tom [Associate Superintendent for Human Resources] sits in on that…We do have also members of the district team that participate in those conversations as well. I wouldn't say necessarily training, but we do have conversations around classified evaluations.

Sometimes principals will put items on the agenda. ‘Here are some questions that we have about paraeducator evaluation,’ or if there's something that they want to talk about. Other times, someone else, Tom might say as a reminder, ‘Let's review the form that we're using. Let's just, if formal evaluations are coming up, let's make if there are any questions. Are we all kind of looking at the same deadline? Are we all on track?’

It just kind of depends, sometimes it's us with questions, principals with questions, and sometimes it's more of just timelines and again reviewing forms. It depends on what the need is. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Discussion about paraeducator evaluation seems to have been limited to the requirements of the written evaluation document. Other important evaluation topics, such as the process of evaluation or the content of evaluation meetings, were not discussed. George explained:

There's been nothing official other than the talks we've had at the school level or whatever we've done with Tom [Associate Superintendent for Human Resources]. This has been more of a, he's the conduit to the principals for any of the associations because he's the counterpart, the HR guy. There will be a new contract and Tom will give us the highlights about what has to happen with their contract vis-a-vis us, our expectations, their attendance at institute days, those kinds of things. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

No mention was made of conversations among the principals about the purpose or content of the appraisals or the protocols principals should use for paraeducator evaluation meetings.
Furthermore, the principals did not recall having received specific training for paraeducator evaluation outside of the district environment. Karen said that she never had any specific training beyond what she used with teachers and that she tried “to imitate [that process] a little bit” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Like Karen, Suzanne also said she tried to apply the training she had received to evaluate teachers to her paraeducator evaluations: “The only formalized training I had was for the teacher evaluation model and so I’ve transferred best practices with that” (Interview, 9-22-2014). George mentioned the formalized, statewide training principals received to evaluate teachers. However, when asked if it supported him in evaluating the paraeducators, he answered, “No” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Without district-wide discussion, the process seemed to vary from principal to principal and from school to school.

In lieu of training and districtwide direction, three of the principals (50%) reflected on other experiences they felt may have informed them as paraeducator evaluators. Marcus noted that he had worked with paraeducators when he was a teacher: “I remember what a good para did for me in the classroom” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Thus, Marcus seemed to believe that his prior experiences of working with paraeducators helped to prepare him to evaluate their performance. When asked if she had been trained as a paraeducator evaluator, Karen answered that she had not, but she immediately declared that she had been a paraeducator for three or four months, perhaps suggesting that her experiences as a paraeducator helped her to evaluate such employees (Interview, 9-22-2014). George thought that he had improved as a paraeducator evaluator because of the discussions he had had with paraeducators (Interview, 9-22-2014).

Overall, the findings show that the principals’ training for paraeducator evaluation was limited to short meetings focused on the requirements of the written evaluation document, their own experiences as teachers or paraeducators, and training they received to evaluate teachers.
The absence of regular and focused evaluator training may have hindered the principals’ ability to cause positive change through the appraisal process.

**Valuing Paraeducators**

As discussed in Question 1, the paraeducators interviewed for this study provided a range of experiences and thoughts regarding the extent to which they felt valued in schools; however, most of the principals shared a belief that paraeducators are important to the functioning of schools or talked about wanting these employees to feel appreciated through the evaluation process.

Two principals (33%) indicated that the paraeducators were important because they help students and teachers. For instance, George described the paraeducator role this way: “Even if the teachers are at the front of the room, the para is in with the kids. So, in some ways, [the paraeducators are] even more physically connected even sometimes than what the teacher is” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Grace assigned an even higher level of responsibility to paraeducators:

We have teaching assistants that really almost play the role of classroom teacher…You will be taking small groups at first. The classroom teachers will be planning the instruction for the paraeducator, but the hope in the long term is that the paraeducator will then be able to take the role of teacher, do the planning…help us determine whether or not our students are meeting their goals. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Grace believed that her paraeducators felt valued and that she and her teachers endeavored to include the paraeducators in fostering a sense of community within the school:

I very strongly value and believe in a sense of community in the fact that we are all working together towards one goal and this is to help students learn and grow. No matter what our role is in our building, we all play a really important part in that. I hope that everyone, paraeducators, teachers, custodians, I hope that they view and know that that is the atmosphere that we’re trying to create.
They feel like an important member of the team. We ask for their input...We don’t value them for doing busy work. We utilize them...to really work with students and make a difference in the lives of students. I think that all of our staff does a really good job showing their appreciation and showing their value for the role that they play in their building...I hope it helps them feel more a greater sense of community, a greater sense of being part of the team, because they are part of the team. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

However, Steven shared an opposing view regarding the value of the work of paraeducators when he explained why he does not spend more time on paraeducator evaluation:

I know I think I have the knowledge to do a good job with these evaluations, but I have to prioritize, okay? Because I'm not required to do this [observe formally], it's one of those things that in my skill, whatever has more impact on student learning, that's where I put my eggs in, so I know the teacher has it. (Interview, 9-22-2014)

Nonetheless, four of the principals (67%) declared that they wanted their paraeducators to feel respected and valued; they also recalled experiences when they had expressed appreciation to the paraeducators during evaluation conferences. Marcus mentioned that paraeducators deserve respect and that is why he tries to mirror the teacher evaluation process (Interview, 9-22-2014). While recalling a particular evaluation conference, Karen stated, “I was able to...give her specific things about what we appreciate about her” (Interview, 9-22-2014), paralleling Grace’s memory of an evaluation meeting in which the paraeducator “felt happy that...all of those little details, those things that she does every single day are being recognized...all of the...things, little and big, that she does to impact students” (Interview, 9-22-2014). Suzanne hoped that if people talked to a paraeducator, “she would say...she felt appreciated and again that we value what she does” (Interview, 9-22-2014).

Overall, the principals agreed that the paraeducators are important to the functioning of schools and wanted them to feel that they are valued; however, the principals’ statements were in contrast to those made by the paraeducators, which reflected that some paraeducators felt valued
while others did not feel respected or appreciated by the principals or others in the school system.

**Research Question 2 Overview**

In summary, the principals described inconsistent practices regarding gathering evidence for evaluations through observations and teacher input as well as the timeliness and frequency with which they provided feedback to paraeducators. Some principals explained that evaluations should be based on data collected through their own observations of the paraeducators’ performance. Although such observations are not required by the paraeducator evaluation plan, they were conducted by some of the principals but not others, thus providing only some of the paraeducators with feedback that had been gathered through the direct observation of the supervisor. The principals also varied regarding their views of including teacher input for evaluations. Some relied on the information in place of conducting their own observations, and others noted they were frustrated that sometimes the teachers provided information about performance concerns they had not shared with the paraeducators, thus making the feedback less valuable. The timeliness and frequency with which principals gave feedback to paraeducators also varied, and one principal acknowledged with regret that most of her feedback went to paraeducators who needed performance support.

When discussing the content of the evaluation meetings, the principals described giving the paraeducators specific information to support ratings along with opportunities to reflect on their own performance. Thus, the principals’ memories of evaluation meetings contrasted with the recollections of the paraeducators, many of whom stated they did not have opportunities to
discuss their progress and reflected that, as a result, evaluation meetings were extremely brief and not focused on professional development.

The principals discussed the purpose of evaluation, and their comments revealed that the paraeducator evaluations in District 3 did not frequently result in improved paraeducator performance and did not typically impact employment decisions. Thus, the purpose of paraeducator evaluation in the school district remains unclear.

When discussing their preparation for evaluating the paraeducators, the principals revealed they did not receive any training specific to evaluating this large employee group as part of principal preparation nor did they spend very much time discussing the topic as an internal administrative team. This lack of training may contribute to the fact that the evaluations did not typically result in employee performance improvement.

Finally, the principals expressed appreciation for the work of the paraeducators and believed that the paraeducators should feel valued through the evaluation process. Their comments contrast with those of many of the paraeducators, which reflected a range of feelings and experiences regarding whether paraeducators are valued by the school system.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This study investigated the process of paraeducator evaluation through qualitative methods that included interviewing paraeducators and principals who participated in paraeducator evaluation and the review of related documents in a mid-sized elementary school district. The following subquestions were also explored:

1. How do paraeducators perceive their experiences with evaluations in their schools?
2. How do principals perceive their experiences of participating in paraeducator evaluation?

I interviewed six principals and fourteen paraeducators using semi-structured questions. As qualitative interviewing offers latitude when asking questions during the meetings, I asked follow-up questions during the interviews to gain clarification and provide new lines of questioning when the participants took conversations in new directions (Patton, 1990). In addition, I triangulated information by reviewing documents related to paraeducator evaluation in the school district, including the present evaluation document, the paraeducator job descriptions, and the paraeducator collective bargaining agreement (Glesne, 1999).
The interviews yielded data that were captured on audiotape and then transferred into transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I developed a descriptive coding system by searching through the data, looking for patterns and topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Saldaña, 2013). I then sorted the data using a manual coding process, first using lumper coding in which a large amount of data is lumped together and one code is assigned to those data to represent the essence of an excerpt and then coded further with splitter coding by splitting the data into smaller pieces (Patton, 1990; Saldaña, 2013). Through this process, important themes were identified in the content and processes of the evaluation meetings, observations, and feedback.

In this chapter, the purpose for evaluation is discussed and the significance of various components of paraeducator evaluation are considered in light of the framework of general employee appraisal and teacher evaluations. Agreements and discrepancies among and between the perspectives of the paraeducators and the principals are considered, findings from both groups are compared to existing research, and implications of the findings are discussed. Finally, recommendations are given in relation to practice and for further research.

Discussion

Process of Paraeducator Evaluation

According to the collective bargaining agreement (Appendix B), the paraeducators in District 3 are evaluated at least every other year by an administrator. Per the document, the evaluations should include a written appraisal and conference between the paraeducator and evaluator. The evaluation instrument (Appendix C) shows that evaluators may gather input from
supervising teachers as part of the process in order to rate paraeducators in the following categories: job knowledge, quality of work, timeliness of work, interpersonal skills, acceptance of supervision, collaboration, communication skills, adaptability, commitment, attendance, and observance of safe practices and procedures. The criteria for rating are categorized into four scales: Exceeds Standard, Meets Standard, Needs Improvement, and Does Not Meet Standard, with descriptions provided for each category. The District 3 evaluation instrument also includes space for comments about each rating category and an area for summary comments. During interviews with District 3 employees, the paraeducators and principals described their experiences in the evaluation process. Their perceptions varied regarding the observations of performance, the feedback received by the paraeducators or given by principals, and evaluation meetings. These variations may be indicators of a lack of common understanding of the evaluation process, including the evaluation expectations for paraeducators in the school system, a finding supported by Riggs and Mueller (2001), whose study indicated that paraeducators were unclear about how they were evaluated.

Observations of Performance and Feedback

The principals and paraeducators described a wide range of experiences regarding observations. The differences between experiences may exist because the District 3 collective bargaining agreement (Appendix B) and the evaluation instrument (Appendix C) do not include a requirement for principals to conduct formal observations of the paraeducators, as provided for among teachers where feedback is expected following pre-arranged observations (PERA, 2010). Regardless of the employee status of paraeducators, employee appraisal literature (e.g., Murphy & Cleveland, 1995) suggests that supervisors should observe a variety of behaviors relevant to
the goals of the job to evaluate employee performance effectively. For example, Danielson (2008) and Whitehurst, Chingos, and Lindquist (2015) contend that observing employees more than once in an evaluation cycle is more likely to result in more accurate assessment of performance. Additionally, French (2003), Pickett and Gerlach (1997) and Watkinson (2008) all recommend that evaluators gather firsthand knowledge of paraeducator performance through scheduled formal observations. Data indicated a lack of districtwide formal observations and inconsistencies, with some of the principals admitting that such observations might help them collect meaningful data about the instructional practices of paraeducators. These principals suggested that a formal observation requirement should be added to the evaluation process for paraeducators. Perhaps if the principals had a clear requirement and procedures to formally observe the paraeducators, they might not only invest the time necessary to have firsthand knowledge about the performance of these employees, they would more likely accurately assess their effectiveness.

Currently, although the principals in District 3 can choose to invite teacher participation in the evaluation of paraeducators, there is no specific requirement for the teachers who supervise the daily work of paraeducators to share observational information with the principals. However, 67% of the principals in this study indicated that they found the observational information they received from supervising teachers to be valuable. Since some paraeducators work under the regular direct supervision of teachers who are present in the classroom at all times (Conley et al., 2010) and have daily opportunities to observe the paraeducators’ performance (Danielson, 2008; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Whitehurst et al., 2015), this finding as suggested in literature indicates that impactful information for evaluation comes from immediate supervisors who have more opportunities to observe the subordinate in a variety of
contexts over a long period of time (Danielson, 2008; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Whitehurst et al., 2015).

Despite the advantages of teachers providing informal feedback on the work of paraeducators as their immediate supervisors (Farr, 1993), the principals in this study explained that the teachers who worked closely with the paraeducators avoided providing immediate feedback of their observations, especially if it was not positive. This phenomenon is supported by research (Sims, 1998). Sims found that a supervisor’s desire to be popular with employees and a general tendency in individuals to avoid conflict may cause immediate supervisors to dislike tasks connected to evaluating employees. Considering that research has suggested that immediate supervisors have greater knowledge of the work of the subordinate, research suggests that teacher training could equip teachers with effective communication skills in how to provide feedback about observed performance without causing conflict in the job relationship (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

Providing frequent and timely feedback has been found to be an evaluator behavior that supports employee performance improvement (Klein, 2011). In this study, the paraeducators reported differing perceptions about how often they received feedback from the principals. For example, while one paraeducator explained that her principal was forthcoming with feedback, other paraeducators explained that their principals did not provide verbal or written feedback unless there was a specific performance concern or they remembered little written feedback on their evaluation documents. The paraeducators indicated that when they did not receive frequent, timely feedback, they felt they missed opportunities to grow professionally, paralleling Klein’s (2011) contention that giving employees ongoing and timely feedback as a supervisor supports employee performance improvement.
If Klein is right, then why does this discrepancy exist in District 3? Principals noted that the time they put into observations and feedback was limited by their focus on other responsibilities. Principals are overwhelmed by a 60 - 80-hour work week that includes attending school and community functions into the evening, managing parent expectations, and completing paperwork in response to district and state mandates, along with supervising and evaluating employees, especially teachers (Hertling, 2001; Johnson, 2005). Therefore, the principals felt they had to prioritize how they spent their limited time so that they are able to focus as much as possible on responsibilities which they perceived to most likely result in enhanced student learning. Principal comments indicate that some principals believed that paraeducators do not have strong instructional value to the school, a supposition supported by Gerber et al.’s 2001 review of Tennessee’s 1990 Project STAR. This report showed that there were no significant differences in student achievement between classes with and without paraeducators, perhaps because data showed that the paraeducators spent only 25-30% of their time on instructional duties and had few opportunities to support student learning. Thus, the principals spend little time observing paraeducators.

Overall, the data in this study suggests that principals place low priority on observing paraeducators. And although teachers in District 3 spend more time with paraeducators and would have the best information about their performance, they are not required to formally observe the paraeducators or provide feedback for the evaluations or directly to the paraeducators. Thus, paraeducators’ opportunities to receive the feedback that is important for performance improvement is likely limited by the existing process (Grote, 2002).
Evaluation Meetings

The descriptions of the contents of evaluation meetings varied widely among the interviewees and markedly between the paraeducator and principal groups, although research (French, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Watkinson, 2008) provides a set of recommendations for paraeducator evaluation that would enhance commonality in evaluation meetings. For example, evaluation meetings should be arranged to provide feedback and identify strategies for performance improvement (Giangreco et al., 1999; Watkinson, 2008). The process should provide opportunities for the employee to ask questions and provide self-assessment as well as give specific examples of proficiencies and deficiencies and focus on problem-solving and goal-setting when discussing concerns (Giangreco et al., 1999; Watkinson, 2008). However, in this study, meetings were not as productive. While some paraeducators explained they had the chance to make comments or ask questions during evaluation meetings, others described evaluation conferences that did not provide for any discussion. In addition, none of the paraeducators described having the chance to reflect on their own growth or set goals with the principal, a process that researchers have found to be a motivational tool for improving performance (Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986).

In contrast to the paraeducators, all six principal participants described conference meetings that included some form of verbal sharing regarding the paraeducators’ progress. It would appear that sometimes the sharing was one-sided: the principal gave verbal feedback and the paraeducators listened. Only half of the principals specifically mentioned giving paraeducators some form of reflection opportunities, and, like the paraeducators, the principals
indicated that the goal setting recommended by Nemeroff and Cosentino (1979) and Ondrack and Oliver (1986) was not part of the evaluation process.

The collective bargaining agreement (Appendix B) requires that an evaluation conference must occur between the paraeducator and the principal, but it is not specific on the details of what should occur. Thus, what occurred during those conferences varied based on the evaluator, and according to some of the paraeducators, they did not have opportunities to discuss and/or understand why they received particular ratings or what steps they needed to take in order to receive improved ratings. In addition, the evaluation meetings did not include teachers, who might have been able to provide additional insight into performance ratings and growth opportunities. In their current form, it does not appear that evaluation meetings are likely to result in performance improvement.

Valuing Paraeducators

According to Pardee (1990), employees feel valued in organizations in which managers incorporate practices that motivate them. In such organizations, employers can expect to see higher productivity and greater job satisfaction in the workplace. However, many of the paraeducators in this study perceived that they were not valued, with some paraeducators appearing to be so eager to speak about this perception that they raised the concern both inside and outside the arena of evaluation. The paraeducators’ perceptions are supported by the low priority the principals seemed to place on the paraeducator evaluation process. The data from this study indicated that although the principals stated they believed the paraeducators are important to the functioning of schools, the minimal amount of time and attention principals put into the paraeducator evaluations may indicate a different reality – that paraeducators’ contributions are
not core to the mission of schools. Communities and school principals may view the primary purpose of schools as furthering student academic achievement and may perceive paraeducators as unskilled labor whose improvement is not likely to fulfill this primary purpose (Gerber et al., 2001). In contrast, some paraeducators indicated they believed their job performance added value not only to the operation of the school, but indirectly to students’ achievement. They also felt their value was recognized through comments the principals and teachers made to them. However, many paraeducators shared the perception that the lack of timely feedback, thoughtful comments on the written evaluation document, and the time to reflect during evaluation meetings minimized the effectiveness of their contributions. Thus, if Ariely’s (2010) contention that we evaluate what we value is true, the lack of attention that principals give to paraeducator evaluation may indicate that principals do not value the paraeducators as instructional supports. Thus, it appears that there may be a discrepancy between how the paraeducators viewed themselves and the value the principals placed on them within the educational system.

Purpose of Evaluation

While the collective bargaining agreement requires formal evaluation of paraeducators in District 3, it is not clear what the outcome expectations are. According to Ondrack and Oliver (1986), appraisals should focus on or lead to performance improvement through coaching, counseling, and goal setting, all of which provide the employee an opportunity to discuss and learn skills necessary for future improvement (see also Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Grote, 2002; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). This purpose is also applied in the evaluation of teachers through PERA in Illinois.
However, overall, only one principal and one paraeducator indicated that an evaluation resulted in sustained performance improvement, which may be an indication that the paraeducator evaluations in District 3 may not be meeting the function of improving performance, as identified in the employee evaluation literature (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Grote, 2002; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007). In fact, many of the study participants indicated that they did not find the evaluations to be purposeful at all. Some paraeducators indicated they were eager to improve through the evaluation process, but they generally did not find opportunities to do so.

Similarly, the principals seemed to know and regret that they were not providing evaluations that were useful to the employees or the school system, and when specifically asked if they remembered examples of paraeducators improving in response to evaluations, some principals stated that when they did share concerns about performance through the evaluations, the improvements were generally short lived. For example, one principal remembered a paraeducator whose work quality improved only for a week. The lack of long-term improvement is not surprising, as the paraeducator evaluation system lacks the components recommended for performance improvement, such as regular and timely feedback (Klein, 2011) based on frequent observation (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995, Watkinson, 2008) and goal setting (Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986).

The findings from this study show that the District 3 principals were not willing to take an active role in improving the paraeducator evaluation process, perhaps because they have many responsibilities they consider more important than paraeducator evaluations (Hertling, 2001; Johnson, 2005). Indeed, they spoke with regret about not spending more time on paraeducator evaluation, noting that although observations and/or goal setting were time consuming, they
could be useful for improving the quality and outcomes of the evaluations. Overall, the paraeducators and principals seemed to have different goals for evaluations: the paraeducators believed they should have opportunities to improve due evaluation, whereas principals were less sure of this, with some conveying a belief that the paraeducators’ ability to improve was limited, perhaps due to the nature of their roles. Nonetheless, if District 3 continues to employ paraeducators on the basis that they provide needed social and instructional services to students, then their evaluations should reflect those needs and help the paraeducators improve to provide supports to students at the highest levels possible.

Conclusion

Data collected in 2004 showed that 91% of public elementary and secondary schools in the United States employed approximately 634,000 paraeducators (Hampden-Thompson, Diehl, & Kinukawa, 2007) and research indicates that employee evaluation serves important functions in organizations, including informing employment decisions and helping employees to improve performance (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Jefferson, 2010; Ondrack & Oliver, 1986; Rebore, 2007), yet the small amount of available literature regarding paraeducator evaluation shows that the performance of these employees often goes unevaluated (Mueller, 2002; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). While none of the participants in the District 3 study suggested that the paraeducators in that district were not evaluated, several important concerns were discovered. The purpose for paraeducator evaluation in District 3 is unclear. Despite their best intentions, many of the principals indicated that they evaluated the paraeducators simply because they were expected to do so. In addition, very little direction regarding the process of paraeducator evaluation was given to evaluators in District 3, which led to a process that was applied inconsistently and
sporadically. Also, the paraeducators’ discussion of their evaluation experiences included descriptions of feeling undervalued by the school system.

Paraeducators might improve due to evaluation if District 3 were to invest time and effort into clarifying the requirements of the process and increasing the evaluation expectations to include direct performance observation and frequent, timely, and useful feedback from principals and teachers; goal setting; and self-reflection. Too much important work must be accomplished in schools, and no employee groups should be engaged in activities that do not bring value to the organization. As they currently exist, the paraeducator evaluations in District 3 take up time without yielding identifiable benefits.

Recommendations for an improved process, training, and district discussions are provided next.

Recommendations for Practice

Although written procedures and practices of the evaluation of paraeducators may vary from district to district and may be applied slightly differently from principal to principal, it is likely that most principals want to provide all school employees, including the paraeducators, with useful evaluations. This study revealed the inconsistencies in District 3. Based on the findings from the current study, the following recommendations for improved paraeducator evaluation practices are discussed below under the categories of process, training, and district discussions.
The current paraeducator evaluation system in District 3 does not serve the important purpose of improving performance. In fact, no clear purposes for the evaluations were apparent throughout the study. The following recommendations are based on the participants’ statements that the evaluations should be more purposeful:

- Evaluations will be more likely to support performance improvement if paraeducators are frequently presented with feedback using observational data. As paraeducators work under the supervision of teachers, perhaps teachers should be required to give paraeducators regular verbal and written performance feedback and participate actively in the evaluation process by meeting with principals to provide input for the appraisals.

- Teachers may provide insight into performance ratings and growth opportunities because they informally observe and interact with paraeducators daily, and thus teachers should be included in evaluation meetings.

- Adding self-assessment and goal setting to the evaluation process should be considered in order to promote the professional growth of paraeducators.

- Some paraeducators do not have instructional responsibilities and instead are hired to support the mobility and/or hygiene of students with physical disabilities or to provide interpretive services for the families of English language learners. Perhaps paraeducators who do not fulfill instructional roles should not be evaluated by principals at all, and the responsibility should instead fall on administrators more closely connected to the work of the paraeducator. In such a case, an evaluation may simply be a review of job responsibilities and appraisal of the effectiveness and efficiency with which the
paraeducator fulfills those responsibilities without the expectation that the evaluation will result in professional growth. For example, a special education coordinator could evaluate a paraeducator who supports the mobility and hygiene of students with disabilities and the evaluation could be a simple check that assigned tasks are performed correctly. In this way, the pressure of using evaluation to support professional development for paraeducators whose job responsibilities do not require such growth could perhaps be lifted from the principals’ shoulders altogether.

**Training**

The following recommendations are made regarding training for principals, teachers, and paraeducators:

- Principals could benefit from professional development about the paraeducator evaluation process in order to improve consistency of methodology.

- It is also recommended that the district host annual discussions for principals about how to promote professional growth for paraeducators through reflective conversations and goal setting as part of the evaluation process.

- The school district should provide supervisory training for the teachers to help them approach difficult conversations with the paraeducators, as the principals and paraeducators indicated that teachers avoid expressing constructive criticism.

- District 3 should provide paraeducators with training regarding how to consider areas for improvement, even when the paraeducators perceive they are putting effort into their work, as paraeducator comments indicate that some of them do not have the requisite skills to reflect thoughtfully about their progress.
District Discussions

Two themes arose throughout the interviews that should be carefully considered by District 3: the perceived lack of purpose regarding paraeducator evaluations and the paraeducators’ perceptions that they are not valued.

- The district should carefully consider the purpose of the evaluation system, discuss whether the current system meets that purpose, and then revise the system as needed, as at present, District 3 seems to require already extremely busy principals to engage in a time-consuming responsibility that is not useful to the school district.

- District 3 would benefit from engaging in discussions that result in the paraeducators feeling more valued, as the paraeducators’ feelings of being undervalued were evident in many of the interviews.

- The district should examine its motivation for employing paraeducators to fulfill instructional duties, as data suggest that the principals do not value the paraeducators as instructional supports. The district might consider employing paraeducators simply to meet the physical needs of students or to interpret for families who are learning English and then shift the responsibility of evaluating them to central office administrators who could assess whether they are meeting the expectations of the positions.

Suggestions for Future Research

Very little research exists about the topic of paraeducator evaluation, and this study sought to fill that void. More investigation about the topic is warranted, and below are specific areas of inquiry for further research:
• I identified the importance of professional growth for the paraeducators. Specifically, eight of the fourteen paraeducators referred to their desire to improve while the principals appeared to be much less focused on this topic. A possible cause for the discrepancy is that the paraeducators were invested in their own growth since they view themselves as developing professionals while the principals view the paraeducator role as one with limited growth potential. Understanding the reasons for the discrepancy is an area for further study.

• The paraeducators and principals differed in their perceptions of what occurred during the evaluation meetings. While none of the paraeducators noted opportunities to reflect on their growth and performance, half of the principals stated that they included such discussion in their evaluation meetings with paraeducators. In addition, paraeducators described much shorter evaluation meetings than the principals. Further research could examine the variance between these two groups’ perceptions of the evaluation meetings.

• While the principals talked about the importance of paraeducators during the interviews, the paraeducators often expressed their perceptions that they are not valued by the administrators in the school district. Future researchers may wish to investigate the gap between how administrators value the paraeducators in their system and the extent to which paraeducators believe that they are valued by administrators.


Lyon, L.K. (2009), Running head: Teacher evaluation and student achievement. *ProQuest LLC*, (UMI No. 3404049)


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE
The following is an Interview Guide for the structured paraprofessional interviews using open-ended questions.

*Paraeducator Interview*

1) What is your name, and what is your current position in the school district? What other positions have you held in education?

2) Talk to me about the evaluation of paraeducators in your school district. Assuming that you or one of your colleagues is being evaluated, tell me what happens. Please walk me through the process. (Possible follow up questions: How often are paraeducators evaluated? Who gives input into and conducts the evaluations? What is the criteria for an evaluation?)

3) In your view, what does evaluation mean to you?

4) In your view, what does evaluation mean to your work?

5) How do evaluations make you feel? (Possible follow up question: How do you feel during the process?)

6) Thank you for bringing in one of your own evaluations for us to review. How did you choose this particular evaluation to review with me?

7) What are your thoughts about this evaluation?

8) What do you remember about the meeting that you had with the principal about this evaluation?

9) What has been the impact of this evaluation on your work as a paraeducator?

10) What advice would you give to your district about paraeducator evaluation?

11) Do you know of any other paraeducators who might have specific feelings about the evaluation process, or advice to give your district about the process?
12) Is there anything that we didn’t talk about that you’d like to discuss regarding paraeducator evaluation?

The following is an Interview Guide for the structured principal interviews using open-ended questions.

**Principal Interview**

1) What is your name, and what is your current position in the school district? What other positions have you held in education?

2) Talk to me about the evaluation of paraeducators in your school district. Assuming that you are evaluating a paraeducator, tell me what happens. Please walk me through the process. (Possible follow up questions: How often are paraeducators evaluated? Who gives input into and conducts the evaluations? What is the criteria for an evaluation?)

3) In your view, what does paraeducator evaluation mean to you?

4) What do you think paraeducator evaluations mean to the paraeducators

5) How does evaluating paraeducators make you feel? (Possible follow up question: How do you feel during the process?)

6) Have you had any training or other experiences that prepared you to evaluate paraeducators? If so, please describe this.

7) Thank you for bringing in two paraeducator evaluations for us to review together. We’ll begin with the one that was easy for you to write. Why was this evaluation easy to write?

8) What do you remember about your meeting with the paraeducator about this evaluation?

9) Did the paraeducator’s performance change in any way in response to this evaluation? If so, how? If not, why not? Did the paraeducator change in any other way after this
10) Why was this second evaluation difficult for you to write?

11) What do you remember about your meeting with the paraeducator about this evaluation?

12) Did the paraeducator’s performance change in any way in response to this evaluation? If so, how? If not, why not? Did the paraeducator change in any other way after this evaluation?

13) Can you give me an example (or another example) of a time when the evaluation process resulted in significant change in a paraeducator’s performance?

14) What advice would you give to your district about paraeducator evaluation?

15) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about any of the evaluations that we’ve been discussing, or about paraeducator evaluation in your school district?
APPENDIX B

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT
SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 62

AND

PARA-EDUCATOR ASSOCIATION

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

2013-2017
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>RECOGNITION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>DUES DEDUCTION/FAIR SHARE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>EMPLOYEE AND ASSOCIATION RIGHTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notice of Board Meetings/Agendas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Copy of Board Minutes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Names and Addresses of Newly Hired Employees</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Association Use of School Facilities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Bulletin Board.Mailboxes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Staff Directories</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>Authorized Agreement – Copies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>Association Leave</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>Association President – Released Time</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Protection From Suit/Legal Counsel</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>Complaints Against Employees</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>Mutually Agreed to Resignations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>Labor-Management Meetings</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Fair Treatment of Employees</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.</td>
<td>Administering Medication or Medical Procedures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.</td>
<td>Para-Educator Welcome Packet</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE/DISCHARGE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Right of Representation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Probationary Period/Just Cause</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>EMPLOYEE EVALUATION</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A. Evaluations .................................................................................................9
B. Multiple Assigned Employees ...................................................................10
C. Association Input .....................................................................................10
D. Notice of Non-Reemployment ................................................................10

ARTICLE VI PERSONNEL FILES ..................................................................10

ARTICLE VII GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE ............................................................11
A. Definitions .................................................................................................11
B. Procedures ...............................................................................................11
C. Arbitration ...............................................................................................12
D. Bypass to Step II ......................................................................................12
E. Bypass to Arbitration ...............................................................................12
F. Association Participation – Employee Represented ....................................13
G. Released Time ..........................................................................................13
H. Grievance Withdrawal ............................................................................13
I. Grievance Documents ...............................................................................13

ARTICLE VIII LEAVES .................................................................................13
A. Sick Leave ...............................................................................................13
B. Workers’ Compensation ........................................................................14
C. Personal Business Leave ..........................................................................14
D. Jury Duty .................................................................................................15
E. Leave of Absence .....................................................................................15
F. Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 ....................................................15

ARTICLE IX SENIORITY ................................................................................15
A. Seniority .................................................................................................15
B. Reduction-in-Force ................................................................................16
C. Recall .......................................................................................................16

ARTICLE X MANAGEMENT RIGHTS ..................................................................17
ARTICLE XI  NO STRIKE OR WORK STOPPAGE ...........................................................17

ARTICLE XII WORKING CONDITIONS .....................................................................18
A. Work Year Calendar............................................................................................18
B. Work Day .............................................................................................................18
C. Overtime ................................................................................................................18

ARTICLE XIII VACANCIES, TRANSFERS AND PROMOTIONS.................................19
A. Posting of Vacancies .........................................................................................19
B. Request for Transfer/Intra-building Reassignment...........................................19
C. Promotional Opportunities ...............................................................................19

ARTICLE XIV COMPENSATION AND FRINGE BENEFITS...........................................19
A. Compensation .....................................................................................................19
B. Pay Periods/Deductions ..................................................................................21
C. Substitute Teaching ..........................................................................................21
D. Health Insurance ...............................................................................................21
E. Term Life Insurance ..........................................................................................22
F. Mileage Allowance ............................................................................................22
G. Extra Duties .........................................................................................................22
H. Early Retirement ..................................................................................................23
I. Professional Growth ............................................................................................24
J. Personal Care Attendant ....................................................................................24
K. Extended School Day .........................................................................................24

ARTICLE XV NEGOTIATION PROCEDURES.............................................................25
A. General ................................................................................................................25
B. Mediation and Impasse ......................................................................................25

ARTICLE XVI SCOPE AND EFFECT OF AGREEMENT..............................................25
A. Complete Understanding ..................................................................................25
B. Savings Clause .....................................................................................................26
C. Terms of Agreement ...........................................................................................26
ARTICLE I
RECOGNITION

A. The Board of Education of District #62, Illinois, (hereinafter the "Board") hereby recognizes the Des Plaines Para-Educator Association, Illinois Education Association-NEA, (hereinafter "DPPEA" or the "Association") as the sole and exclusive bargaining representative for all full-time para-educators employed by the District. Such representation shall exclude all managerial, supervisory, confidential or short-term employees within the meaning of Section 2 of the IELRB. "Bargaining unit member", "employee", or "para-educator" when used hereinafter in this Agreement shall refer to all employees represented by the DPPEA, IEA-NEA, in the bargaining unit as above defined. The term "District," "Board," or "employer" when used hereinafter in this Agreement shall refer to the Board of Education of School District 62 or its administrative or supervisory personnel.

ARTICLE II DUES DEDUCTION/FAIR SHARE

A. Any member of the bargaining unit who is a member or has applied for membership in the Association may sign and deliver to the District a written authorization for dues deduction. The appropriate authorization forms shall be provided by the Association. Such authorization shall remain in effect from year to year unless the employee revokes said authorization in writing between the start of the school year and October 1 of any year.

B. The District shall deduct from each employee's pay the current dues of the Association provided the District has received an official notification of the dues amount or increase thereof. Pursuant to such authorization, the District shall deduct such dues from the regular salary check of the bargaining unit member each month beginning no later than October and ending in June of each year. The District shall remit said deduction dues to the Association within fifteen (15) days following the pay period deduction. The District shall deduct the dues authorized from those employees who are employed after the commencement of the school year in as equal installments as possible to insure the proper dues are deducted for those employees by June of the school year.
C. Fair Share

1. It is recognized that the negotiation and administration of this Agreement shall entail expenses, which appropriately are shared by all employees who are beneficiaries of said Agreement. To this end, effective with the commencement of the 1990-91 school year, if an employee does not join the Association or execute a dues deduction authorization mutually agreed upon by the parties thereto, such employee will:
   a. Execute an authorization for the deduction of a sum equal to the cost of services rendered by the Association that are chargeable to nonmembers under state or federal law; or
   b. Pay directly to the Association a like sum.

2. In the event such an authorization is not signed or such direct payment is not made within thirty (30) days following the commencement of employment of the employee or the effective date of this Section C, whichever is later, the Board will deduct from the regular salary check of the employee the fair share fee in payments of equal installments, starting with the subsequent payroll period, provided:
   a. The Association has posted the appropriate notice of imposition of such fair share fee in accordance with the rules and regulations of the IELRB; and
   b. The Association has annually certified in writing to the Board the amount of such fair share fee - - which amount must not exceed that permitted by applicable law - - and has annually certified in writing to the Board that such notice has been posted.
3. In no event shall the Board begin such fair share fee deduction earlier than fourteen (14) days (or any later period as required by the Rules and Regulations of the IELRB) after certification by the Association.

4. The provision of this Section shall not apply to any employee employed after the start of the second semester for the remainder of that year only.

5. The parties expressly recognize the right of employees to challenge the amount of fair share fees. The parties acknowledge that such challenges will be handled pursuant to rules adopted by the IELRB.

6. In the event an employee objects to the amount of such fee, the Board shall continue to deduct the fee and transmit the fee (or the portion of the fee in dispute) to the IELRB which shall hold the fee in escrow in an account established for that purpose. The Board shall continue to transmit all such fees to the IELRB until further order of the IELRB. If the employee is entitled to a refund, the employee shall receive such refund plus any interest earned on the refund during pendency of the action pursuant to then applicable IELRB procedures.

7. If a nonmember employee declares the right of nonassociation based upon bona fide religious tenets, such employee shall be required to pay an amount equal to the employee's proportionate share to a nonreligious charitable organization mutually agreed upon by the employee and the Association. If the employee and the Association are unable to reach agreement on the matter, a charitable organization shall be selected from a list established and approved by the IELRB in accordance with its rules.

8. The Association, the Illinois Education Association and the National Education Association agree to indemnify, save and hold the Board harmless against any claims, demands, suits, or other form of liability which may arise by reason of any action
taken or omitted by the Association or the Board in complying with the provisions of this Section, including reimbursement for any legal fees or expenses incurred in connection therewith.

9. The Board agrees to notify the Association promptly in writing of any written claim, demand, or suit in regard to which it will seek to implement the provisions of Section C above, and if the Association so requests in writing, to surrender claims, demands, suits or other forms of liability.

ARTICLE III

EMPLOYEE AND ASSOCIATION RIGHTS

A. Notice of Board Meetings/Agendas

The president of the Association or the president's designee shall be given written notice of all regular and special meetings of the Board together with a copy of the agenda or statement of purpose of each meeting, insofar as practicable, twenty-four (24) hours prior to the scheduled time of each meeting.

B. Copy of Board Minutes

One (1) copy of official Board minutes shall be made available to the Association in accordance with normal distribution practices.

C. Names and Addresses of Newly Hired Employees

Names and addresses of newly hired bargaining unit employees shall be made available upon request to the Association President within fourteen (14) days after their employment. Further, an updated list of the names and addresses of all bargaining unit employees will be sent to the Association President by October 1 of each year.
D. Association Use of School Facilities

The Association and its representatives shall have the right to hold a reasonable number of official meetings after regular school hours on District property, related to the Association's role as bargaining agent for bargaining unit employees, provided that such meetings shall have been scheduled in advance with the District office and in no way interfere with District use of said property, and that when out-of-pocket expense is incurred by the District, the Association will reimburse the District for the cost of same.

E. Bulletin Board/Mailboxes

The Association shall have the right to post notices of activities and matters of Association concern on at least one area of a designated bulletin board area in each school building. The Association may use the District mail service and employee mailboxes, in keeping with Board policy, for a reasonable volume of materials pertaining to the Association's representation of bargaining unit employees. All material so posted or disseminated through school channels shall be distributed simultaneously to principals involved and the Superintendent, and shall clearly indicate authorship.

F. Staff Directories

The [DPPEA] and its president shall be listed in the Staff Directory, which is prepared annually by the District.

G. Authorized Agreement - Copies

Upon completion of negotiations, an authorized Agreement shall be signed by the Board of Education president and the president of [DPPEA]. A copy of this Agreement will be distributed to all District para-educators. The cost of providing these copies shall be borne equally by the District and [DPPEA].

H. Association Leave

The District will permit employees from the bargaining unit to be absent from work without loss of pay for up to a maximum total for the bargaining unit of eight (8) days per school year for official Association business on the following conditions:

1. The Association shall reimburse the District for the cost of the substitute(s).
2. The Association President shall provide the Superintendent or designee written notification of the leave at least five (5) days in advance of the commencement of the leave.

3. No more than five (5) employees shall be on such leave at the same time.

I. Association President -- Released Time

Released time, up to a total aggregate of six (6) days per year in not less than one-half (1/2) day increments, without loss of pay, shall be provided the President for the purpose of carrying out Association business in accordance with the procedures and conditions in Section H (1) and (2) above.

J. Protection from Suit/Legal Counsel

The Board shall agree to indemnify and protect para-educators against death and bodily injury and property damages, claims and suits, including defense thereof, when damages are sought for negligent and wrongful acts allegedly committed during the scope of employment or under the direction of the Board. There shall be no deduction in salary for time lost as a result of legal or quasi-legal proceedings held pursuant to the Board's commitments for indemnification and defense in this section.

K. Complaints against Employees

Any complaint, including student or parent complaint, deemed by any administrator or the Board to justify investigation and/or disciplinary action shall be brought to the prompt attention of the employee involved. No action shall be taken until such information has been supplied to the employee.

L. Mutually Agreed to Resignations

Where resignation is mutually agreed to by the Board and para-educator because continued employment is deemed inadvisable, resignation may be submitted without prejudice to the para-educator's written record. The administration shall, upon acceptance of resignation, provide upon written request accurate copies of evaluations which exist to the para-educator, and shall add no reports to the para-educator's folder.
regarding the incident(s) leading to resignation unless criminal charges are brought and proven.

M. Labor-Management Meetings

The Superintendent, Association President, other representatives of the Administration and Association leaders will meet monthly or on mutually agreed upon dates to review the administration of the contract, consider non-contractual professional matters of mutual concern, and resolve problems that may arise. These meetings are not intended to by-pass the grievance procedure.

Should such a meeting result in a mutually acceptable amendment to the Agreement, the amendment shall be reduced to writing, ratified by the District 62 Board of Education and the Association, and signed as an appendix to this Agreement. The ongoing meetings will in no way constitute a waiver on the part of the Association of mid-term bargaining rights which may be granted under the IELRA.

N. Fair Treatment of Employees

The parties agree that the provisions of this Agreement shall not be applied in a manner that is arbitrary, capricious or discriminatory.

O. Administering Medication or Medical Procedures

Under no circumstances will bargaining unit members (employees) be required to administer medication to students; however, those employees who voluntarily administer medication, or medical procedures, or provide emergency assistance to students within the scope of their employment will be indemnified as provided in Article III, Section J of this agreement, and Board Policy.

P. Safety

The Administration shall promptly review and respond to any safety concerns about the work environment, which are communicated by the bargaining unit to the Administration.
Q. Para-Educator Welcome Packet

Human Resources will provide para-educators with a current welcome packet. The welcome packet will be posted on the District’s Intranet.

ARTICLE IV EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE/DISCHARGE

A. Right of Representation

Upon request, a bargaining unit member shall be entitled to have present a representative of the Association during any meeting relative to disciplinary action.

B. Probationary Period/Just Cause

Once employees have satisfactorily completed two full calendar years from date of initial employment as a probationary paraeducator with the District, they shall not be suspended or discharged, without just cause.

ARTICLE V

EMPLOYEE EVALUATION

A. Evaluations

Employees may be evaluated each academic year, and shall be evaluated at least every other year. Each employee’s evaluation shall include a conference with his/her principal or other administrator and a written evaluation of his/her job performance using a paraeducator’s educational support personnel appraisal form and following the procedures established by the joint committee as stated in Part C of this section. Employees will be provided with annual notice of whether he/she will be evaluated in the current school year by October 1st. Every reasonable effort will be made to complete the formal evaluation by May 1st of any year in which an employee is formally evaluated by the principal or other administrator. Each employee shall have the opportunity to respond in writing to the evaluation. Each evaluation will become a part of the employee’s personnel file.
B. Multiple Assigned Employees

All para-educators who have multiple building/work locations shall be assigned a primary evaluator.

C. Association Input

The District will provide the Association with a copy of any evaluation instrument related to para-educators prior to the adoption of such an instrument and will consider comments of the Association concerning such instrument. At the beginning of a new contract, a joint committee consisting of personnel and appropriate administration will convene to review job descriptions and the evaluation process for members. The committee shall consist of six (6) members, three (3) from the Association appointed by the President and three (3) from Administration.

D. Notice of Non-Reemployment

No non-probationary para-educator will be dismissed without first having been formally evaluated in the school year of the dismissal.

ARTICLE VI PERSONNEL FILES

There shall be only one official personnel file. All materials that pertain to a para-educators’ work performance shall be signed and dated by the para-educator. Written comments shall not be placed in a para-educator’s personnel file without said para-educator first seeing and reading them. The para-educator shall have the right to examine his/her personnel file upon request during regular business hours. Each employee has the right to respond to any materials placed in their personnel file and have the response attached to the materials. The Superintendent or his/her designee shall notify, in writing, any para-educator if a request for information is made under the Freedom of Information Act at least one (1) work day prior to releasing information to the requestor, to the extent such notice is possible. The notification shall include the name of the individual making the request and the documents that have been requested. The district shall not disclose any documents, which are expressly considered exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.
ARTICLE VII

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

A. Definitions

1. Any claim by the Association or any employee that there has been a violation, misinterpretation or misapplication of the terms of this Agreement, shall be a grievance.

2. The failure of an employee or the Association to act on any grievance within the prescribed time limits will act as a bar to any further appeal. An administrator's failure to give a decision within the prescribed time limits shall permit the grievance automatically to proceed to the next step. These time limits may be extended by mutual written agreement.

3. All time limits consist of school days, except that when the grievance procedure extends beyond the last day of the regular school term, time limits shall consist of all weekdays.

B. Procedures

The parties hereby acknowledge that it is usually most desirable for an employee and the employee's immediately involved supervisor to resolve problems through free and informal communications. When requested by the employee, an Association representative may accompany the employee to assist in the informal resolution of the grievance. If the informal process does not resolve the matter, a grievance may be processed as follows:

STEP I -- Within twenty-five (25) days following the occurrence of the event giving rise to the grievance, the employee or the Association may present the grievance in writing to the building principal, who will arrange for a meeting to take place within ten (10) days after receipt of the grievance. The Association's representative, if desired by the grievant, the grievant, and the building principal
shall be present for the meeting. If the grievance cannot be resolved at this meeting, then within ten (10) days of the meeting, the grievant and the Association shall be provided with the building principal's written response, including the reasons for the decision.

STEP II – If the grievance is not resolved at Step I, then the Association or employee may refer the grievance to the Superintendent or to the Superintendent’s official designee within ten (10) days after the receipt of Step I answer. The Superintendent or designee shall arrange with the Association representatives for a meeting to take place within ten (10) days of the Superintendent’s receipt of that appeal. Each party shall have the right to include in its representation such witnesses and Association representatives as it deems necessary. If the grievance cannot be resolved at this meeting, then within fifteen (15) days of the meeting, the Association shall be provided with the Superintendent’s or designee’s written response including the reasons for the decision.

C. Arbitration

STEP III – If the Association is not satisfied with the disposition of the grievance at Step II, the Association may submit the grievance to final and binding arbitration. The American Arbitration Association (AAA) shall act as the administrator of the proceedings. If a demand for arbitration is not filed within twenty (20) days of the date for the Step II answer, then the grievance shall be deemed withdrawn. The arbitrator shall follow the standard rules of the AAA, and shall have no authority or jurisdiction to add to, subtract from, alter or modify the terms of this Agreement. The fees and the expense of the arbitrator shall be shared equally by the parties. If the parties agree, the arbitrator may follow AAA’s expedited rules.

D. Bypass to Step II – If the Association and the immediate supervisor agree, Step I of the grievance procedure may be bypassed and the grievance brought directly to Step II.

E. Bypass to Arbitration – If the Superintendent or designee and the Association agree, Step II of the grievance procedure may be bypassed and a grievance may be submitted directly to arbitration.

F. Association Participation – Employee Representation
The grievant is allowed Association representation at any step of the process. When an employee is not represented by the Association, a representative of the Association may be present as an observer at all formal steps of the grievance procedure. No employee shall be required to discuss his/her grievance if the Association’s representative is not present.

G. Released Time

Should the investigation or processing of any grievance not be able to be handled outside normal work hours and instead require that employees be released from their regular assignment, such employee shall be released without loss of pay or benefits.

H. Grievance Withdrawal

A grievance may be withdrawn at any level without establishing precedent.

I. Grievance Documents

Grievances and documents pertaining solely to the processing of grievances shall be kept separate from employee personnel files.

ARTICLE VIII

LEAVES

A. Sick Leave

At the beginning of each school year, each full-time para-educator shall be credited, without loss of pay, ten (10) days sick leave for probationary para-educators, twelve (12) days sick leave for para-educators with two (2) through six (6) years of experience in District and fifteen (15) days sick leave for para-educators with seven (7) or more years of experience in District. Sick leave days will be prorated for para-educators who are hired or separate service during the school year. For less than a full term of employment, sick leave days will be adjusted on a prorated basis by dividing the employee’s sick leave days by the number of days by classification, and then multiplied by the actual number of days worked. The sick leave days may be used for personal illness, quarantine at home, serious illness or death in the immediate family or household, or birth, adoption or placement for adoption. For purposes of this Section, the immediate family shall be defined by the Illinois School Code to include parents, spouse, brothers,
sisters, children, grandparents, grandchildren, parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and legal guardians. Sick leave will accumulate without limitation.

**B. Workers' Compensation**

Absence due to injury or illness incurred in the course of employment and which qualifies for workers’ compensation under the Illinois Workers’ Compensation Act, shall be charged in accordance with Board of Education policy.

**C. Personal Business Leave**

At the beginning of each school year, each employee shall be credited with three (3) days to be used for personal business. Personal business is hereby defined as actual business that cannot be accomplished other than during regular working hours. An employee planning to use a personal business leave day or days shall notify his/her supervisor at least three days in advance, except in cases of emergency. Personal business leave days shall be available for the practice of individual religious preferences regardless of the day of the week. Such leave shall be noncumulative, but will be added to the accumulated sick leave days under the terms of Section A above. The day immediately preceding or immediately following a legal holiday or school recess shall not be recognized as a personal leave day except upon approval of the appropriate district administrator. Requests for such exceptions must be submitted in writing to the Superintendent or designee.

**D. Jury Duty**

Any employee called for jury duty during working hours shall be paid his/her full salary for such time and suffer no loss of benefits or contractual advantage.

**E. Leave of Absence**

Leave of absence without pay may be granted for reasons consistent with Board Policy. No employee, however, will be granted a leave of absence to seek employment elsewhere.

**F. Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993**

The Family and Medical Leave Act applies to the District. The Act allows eligible employees to obtain unpaid leaves of absence for certain family and medical reasons for
up to twelve (12) weeks, with job protection and no loss of service accumulated prior to commencement of the leave. The Association recognizes the District’s right to adopt and enforce an FMLA policy and rules and procedures consistent with the Act.

ARTICLE IX

SENIORITY

A. Seniority

Seniority shall be defined as the length of continuous full-time service within the district. Said service shall be computed from the first day of current uninterrupted employment within the unit. The "first day" shall be defined as the day upon which duties are first performed. Seniority will not accrue during any leave-of-absence without pay in excess of thirty (30) working days.

B. Reduction-in-Force

If the Board determines that a reduction in force is necessary, the Association will be provided an opportunity to participate in discussion related to those reductions. Paraeducators shall be laid off in the reverse order of their service in the District (seniority) within each of the following classifications:

1. Preschool through eighth grade general education program para-educators

2. Preschool through eighth grade special education program para-educators

3. Preschool through eighth grade English Language Learners (ELL) program para-educators

4. Preschool through eighth grade single student assignment para-educators

The para-educators with the least seniority in the affected category shall be laid off first. Notification of the layoff shall be by certified mail (return receipt requested) at least 30 days prior to the effective date of the layoff.

C. Recall

Seniority recall rank will be granted to employees who have the ability and qualifications to perform jobs in the classifications set forth in Section B, Reduction-in-Force, and who
have been employed in the bargaining unit for at least two (2) full years. Qualified employees are eligible for seniority recall rank only to vacant positions in the job classification from which they were laid off, except that qualified employees in classifications 1 and 2 who have had at least one (1) full school year of consecutive experience in the other classification from which they were laid off may exercise their seniority for employment in such other classification. Qualified employees who are laid off from classifications 3 and 4 may exercise their seniority, subject to the requirement of at least one (1) full school year of consecutive experience, for employment in classifications 1 and 2. At the Board's sole discretion, the experience requirement may be waived in any particular case, provided that the Association President be notified of the exception. For purposes of recall hereunder, employees will retain their seniority for a period of two (2) years following the date of layoff.

ARTICLE X

MANAGEMENT RIGHTS

The Board reserves its complete authority to take action with respect to the policies and administration of the school system, which authority it exercises under the School Code; provided, however, that such action will not be contrary to the terms and conditions of this Agreement or any state rules and regulations.

ARTICLE XI

NO STRIKE OR WORK STOPPAGE

During the term of this Agreement there shall be no strike, work stoppage, picketing, or any other form of concerted activity by the Association, its members, or any employees covered by this Agreement which causes any District employees to render less than full and complete services to the District. This prohibition applies whether or not the conduct is subject to the grievance procedure hereunder.

ARTICLE XII

WORKING CONDITIONS

A. Work Year Calendar

The work year for the 2013-2014 school year will be the same 180 days as were worked in 2012-2013. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year and continuing, para-educators
may be paid up to 180 days. These days shall be broken down as follows: 177 on-site attendance days and 19.5 hours of pay for participation in district provided professional development. Such professional development must be completed by April 1st annually. Para-educators who do not complete the 19.5 hours of professional development by April 1st will have their salaries adjusted accordingly. By June 1st, the association will be given a work calendar establishing the on-site attendance days for the following school year. The 19.5 hours of professional development may not be completed during an on-site attendance day.

B. Work Day

The normal workday for para-educators is six-and-one-half (6.5) hours per day. All paraeducators are entitled to a thirty (30) minute uninterrupted duty free lunch.

C. Overtime

Full-time employees who work more than forty (40) hours in a work week will be compensated at time and a half. Work requiring overtime in the regular job assignment will be compensated at 1X times the employee’s regular hourly rate. Overtime earned while doing an assigned extra duty will be compensated at 1X times the extra duty rate according to the DPEA contract.

ARTICLE XIII

VACANCIES, TRANSFERS AND PROMOTIONS

A. Posting of Vacancies

When a vacancy for a para-educator occurs, notice of such vacancy shall be posted on the District website and e-mailed to all staff. On-line applications will be accepted from employees within the district.

B. Request for Transfer/Intra-building Reassignment

An employee may at any time notify the Human Resources Department in writing if he/she is interested in a transfer or change in assignment within the building to an existing vacancy. The employee shall receive written acknowledgement, in a timely manner, that a request for transfer was received.
C. Promotional Opportunities

The District shall give consideration to all District employees who apply when any position or promotional opportunities are available.

ARTICLE XIV

COMPENSATION AND FRINGE BENEFITS

A. Compensation

The starting hourly rate of pay for new full-time hires shall be:

School Years 2013-2017:
- Highly Qualified: $13.75
- Bachelors: $15.00

Para-educators hired for the 2013-2014 school year will remain at the above rate until 2014-2015.

The increases for currently employed para-educators under the terms of this Agreement shall be as follows:

School Year 2013-2014: 3.25 %
School Year 2014-2015: 3.0 %
School Year 2015-2016: 3.0 %
School Year 2016-2017: CPI +0.75% not to exceed 4.0% or be less than 2.0%

Para-educators paid at more than two (2) times the BA starting rate of pay shall receive an annual increase of 50% of the annual increase noted above.

For 2016-2017, the increase in the hourly rate shall be based upon the Consumer Price Index – Urban Model following the criteria set forth below:

The annual increase is based upon the percentage of the December National CPI-U from the levy year that applies to the Fiscal Year.

Continuing Education
Para-educators who are highly qualified and who earn an Associate’s Degree/60 hours towards education, will receive an additional lump sum payment of $450.00, which will be calculated into the hourly rate.

Para-educators who currently have an Associate’s Degree and who earn a Bachelor’s Degree in Education, will receive an additional lump sum payment of $750.00, which will be calculated into the hourly rate.

Para-educators must provide notice to the District by the first day of student attendance of the ten-month school year calendar in the year for which the degree towards education is sought. The district will provide para-educators with a form for this purpose prior to the commencement of the school year.

Longevity Program
Para-educators in District  will receive the following longevity increments as applicable:

- Year 10-14 in District: $1.03/hr. $1,200.00
- Year 15-19 in District: $1.28/hr. $1,500.00
- Year 20-24 in District: $1.54/hr. $1,800.00
- Year 25 + in District: $1.71/hr. $2,000.00

An MOU regarding longevity is attached to this agreement.

The longevity increments shall be calculated into the para-educator’s applicable hourly rate of pay and shall not be compounded from year to year.

B. Pay Periods/Deductions
Para-educators will be paid on the same day(s) of the month as are other district employees. Para-educators are required to participate in the District’s payroll direct deposit program. Para-educators will be paid twice each month from August through June, twenty-two (22) pays per year. Health, withholding tax, credit union, etc., shall be deducted on an eleven-month basis in equal proportions.

C. Substitute Teaching
Upon prior approval from the Human Resources Department, para-educators who hold
valid Illinois teaching certificates and who serve as substitute teachers shall receive the teacher substitute salary for said services (provided such pay is higher than the amount of pay that otherwise would be paid to the para-educator).

D. Health Insurance

All employees who work the minimum weekly hours as mandated by State or Federal law will be covered for health care under the District’s insurance plans as follows:

Medical –

1. One hundred percent (100%) of the individual coverage cost.

2. Family coverage will be the same as provided in the DPEA contract.

3. The Association shall have two members as representatives on the District Insurance Committee.

4. The parties agree to continue an Insurance Committee. The Committee shall meet annually or as otherwise necessary to review and assess insurance benefits and premium rates, including cost containment measures, and may make recommendations to the Board and the Association. Nothing precludes the Board from changing insurance carriers or insurance coverage provided benefit levels remain substantially the same or better than the coverage in place on the effective date of this Agreement.

5. The Board shall offer, at its own expense, an annual wellness screening for all employees. Notwithstanding 1. and 2., those employees who do not elect to obtain a wellness screening or do not otherwise provide evidence of obtaining a wellness screening from his/her own physician, shall contribute an additional $100 per month toward the cost of insurance coverage.

Vision – See District plan.

Dental –

1. One hundred percent (100%) of the individual coverage cost.

2. Option to buy in on family coverage.

3. Orthodontia coverage shall be according to the plan document in effect for each year of the contract.
E. Term Life Insurance

The Board of Education will provide a term life insurance policy in the amount of $50,000 for all full-time para-educators.

F. Mileage Allowance

Para-educators who use their own automobile for approved school business shall be reimbursed for mileage in accordance with the District rules and regulations.

G. Extra Duties

In the event that no certified staff have applied for, or have not been assigned to the extra duties, para-educators may make application to perform additional duties during the school year for an additional payment. Employees must receive written approval from the building principal prior to performing extra pay duties. Para-educators assigned an extra duty during the normal workday will arrange an alternative time to work with the principal of that building.

The building principal will regularly evaluate the employee’s performance of each extra duty. Unsatisfactory performance may result in the forfeiture of the duty at any time during the school year.

These duties shall be held on a yearly basis unless otherwise designated at the time of assignment or unless the employee leaves employment in the district or is dismissed from the duty assignment through the principal’s evaluation procedures. In the event that duties are held for less than a full year, payment for such duties shall be prorated.

In the event that no single employee applies for an extra duty assignment, a number of employees may apply for this same duty and may divide the responsibilities. Paraeducators may not be assigned extra duty assignments that result in them working more than 40 hours in a standard work-week without prior administrative approval.

Among employees handling a single duty, payment will be divided equally. Each employee shall receive his/her share in his/her regular monthly check.

Para-educators who perform extra duties shall receive the hourly rate as provided in the DPEA contract. The Instructional and Non-Instructional extra duties available to paraeducators are as provided in the DPEA contract (Extra Duties Schedule).
H. Early Retirement

The Board agrees to negotiate with the Association prior to adopting any changes in its early retirement program for para-educators. An early retirement option exists in District School Board Policy 5.285. This is available to full-time career para-educators on the payroll. Employees who take early retirement shall be allowed to continue participation in the District’s group major medical program provided that they remit their own premiums to the Business Office.

I. Professional Growth

If the district requires a para-educator to participate in professional development in addition to the 19.5 professional development hours noted in Article XII, Section A, the para-educator shall be compensated at his/her hourly rate of pay.

J. Personal Care Attendant

Para-educators who are assigned daily personal care duties for students in the pre-school structured autism class and pre-school self-contained special education classroom shall be paid a $500.00 annual stipend. This annual stipend shall also be paid to para-educators who are assigned to serve students in grades kindergarten through eighth who have toileting and personal care needs identified on their Individualized Education Program (IEP). Para-educators who are assigned to such classrooms for a portion of the day shall be paid the stipend on a prorated basis, based on the actual hours worked. “Personal care duties” are defined as diapering, toileting, oral feeding, dressing, performing personal hygiene care, and meeting other self-care needs. Para-educators who are assigned to perform daily personal care duties shall be notified of their assignment upon hire or prior to the beginning of each school year.

K. Extended School Day

Para-educators attending extended day/overnight school events will fill out a time sheet and be paid at their current hourly rate of pay. Para-educators will not be paid for defined sleep hours during any overnight programs, unless they are required to do work duties during the defined sleep times. In this case, they will be paid at their hourly rate.
ARTICLE XV
NEGOTIATION PROCEDURES

A. General

The parties agree that their duly designated representatives shall negotiate in good faith with respect to terms and conditions of employment. Each party shall select its own representatives. Neither party shall have more than six (6) representatives at any one time. Negotiations shall begin no later than March 1st of the year in which this Agreement terminates.

B. Mediation and Impasse

After a reasonable period of negotiation and within 90 days of the scheduled start of the school year, either party may petition the Illinois Education Labor Relations Board to initiate mediation. After mediation has commenced and continued for at least 15 days, either party may declare an impasse in accordance with the provisions of Section 12(a-5) of the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act (115 ILCS 5/12(a-5)).

ARTICLE XVI
SCOPE AND EFFECT OF AGREEMENT

A. Complete Understanding

This Agreement constitutes the entire and complete understanding between the parties concerning wages and terms and conditions of employment for the duration of this Agreement. The parties hereby agree that this Agreement is in full settlement of all outstanding issues between the parties, and that this Agreement may be altered, changed, added to, or deleted from, or modified only through the mutual consent of the parties in a written, executed amendment of this Agreement.
APPENDIX C

2012 – 2013 CLASSIFIED SUPPORT PERSONNEL EVALUATION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>Teacher input received:</th>
<th>☐ Yes</th>
<th>☐ No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 <strong>Job Knowledge:</strong> Fulfills essential duties and responsibilities as detailed in job description.</td>
<td>☐ Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>☐ Meets Standard</td>
<td>☐ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistently performs duties that contribute to the students and school’s success</td>
<td>Frequently demonstrates abilities within critical elements of the job</td>
<td>Inconsistently demonstrates abilities within critical elements of the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 <strong>Quality of Work:</strong> Completion of all work related to this position in a thorough and accurate manner.</td>
<td>☐ Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>☐ Meets Standard</td>
<td>☐ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work performance exceeds expectations for this position in quality, timeliness and accuracy</td>
<td>Work performed is consistently accurate, thorough and completed within project deadline</td>
<td>Work is often inconsistent and requires checking for accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 <strong>Timeliness of Work:</strong> Completion of all work related to this position in a timely manner within guidelines.</td>
<td>☐ Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>☐ Meets Standard</td>
<td>☐ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assigned and routine job tasks are completed without prompting in timely manner</td>
<td>Work performed is consistently completed within project deadlines</td>
<td>Work performed is inconsistent/incomplete within reasonable timelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 <strong>Interpersonal Skills:</strong> Demonstrated respect, courtesy and compassion in the school community.</td>
<td>☐ Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>☐ Meets Standard</td>
<td>☐ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always demonstrates a genuine concern for all without complaint</td>
<td>Courteous to others, complaints rarely received, excellent self-control demonstrated</td>
<td>At times unprofessional, lacks self-control and with complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptance of Supervision:</strong> Ability to follow instructions and accept suggestions from supervisory personnel.</td>
<td>☐ Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>☐ Meets Standard</td>
<td>☐ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always sets high personal performance goals that improve the school</td>
<td>Accepts supervision and direction well, questions supervision in a constructive manner</td>
<td>Not open to suggestions or instructions from supervisor</td>
<td>Requires constant supervision, disregards supervision and directions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Collaboration:</strong> Demonstrated collaborative, positive attitude when working with staff.</th>
<th>☐ Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>☐ Meets Standard</th>
<th>☐ Needs Improvement</th>
<th>☐ Does Not Meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always demonstrates a collaborative, positive attitude in the workplace</td>
<td>Consistently demonstrates a collaborative, positive attitude in the workplace</td>
<td>Inconsistent personal behavior impacts the collaboration effort in the workplace</td>
<td>Personal behaviors disrupt the workplace and completion of job tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Communication Skills:</strong> Demonstrated quality and frequency of confidential communications within the school community.</th>
<th>☐ Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>☐ Meets Standard</th>
<th>☐ Needs Improvement</th>
<th>☐ Does Not Meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Models professionalism in all written and verbal communications without exception</td>
<td>Completes correspondence and employee matters in a confidential and timely manner</td>
<td>Does not have a grasp of confidentiality and needs to be reminded of professionalism</td>
<td>Does not maintain confidentiality when required and is unprofessional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Adaptability:</strong> Ability to adjust and re-direct behavior and performance within the school.</th>
<th>☐ Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>☐ Meets Standard</th>
<th>☐ Needs Improvement</th>
<th>☐ Does Not Meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job experience, knowledge makes this employee the &quot;go to&quot; person on unique job situations</td>
<td>Usually exercises good judgment in dealing with varied job situations</td>
<td>Has difficulty adjusting to new situations within the job</td>
<td>Regularly relies on others for direction, and does not adjust to new situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Commitment:</strong></th>
<th>☐ Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>☐ Meets Standard</th>
<th>☐ Needs Improvement</th>
<th>☐ Does Not Meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to demonstrate commitment to the job and acceptance of responsibility.</td>
<td>Demonstrates commitment, responsibility and ownership in all job tasks</td>
<td>Completes job tasks as assigned while accepting responsibility for personal actions</td>
<td>Has difficulty completing assigned job tasks and accepting responsibility for personal actions</td>
<td>Fails to complete duties of the job and does not demonstrate responsibility for personal actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Attendance:</strong></th>
<th>☐ Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>☐ Meets Standard</th>
<th>☐ Needs Improvement</th>
<th>☐ Does Not Meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documented employee attendance at work.</td>
<td>Employee is rarely absent or late to work</td>
<td>Sometimes absent or late to work providing supervisor with advance notice as required</td>
<td>Employee has had conversations with supervisor regarding attendance issues</td>
<td>Excessive absenteeism or tardiness to work above the allotted number of sick/personal days allowed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Observance of Safe Practices and Procedures:</strong></th>
<th>☐ Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>☐ Meets Standard</th>
<th>☐ Needs Improvement</th>
<th>☐ Does Not Meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follows consistent observation of work safe practices and procedures.</td>
<td>Follows work practices and improves safety practices</td>
<td>Routinely adheres to safety practices and workplace compliance matters</td>
<td>Is inconsistent in following safety practices and workplace compliance matters</td>
<td>Frequently neglects common safety practices without regard for the safety of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**
APPENDIX D

2007 CLASSIFIED PERSONNEL EVALUATION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>Meets Standard</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Job Knowledge:</strong> Fulfills essential duties and responsibilities as detailed in job description.</td>
<td>Consistently performs duties that contribute to the students and school's success.</td>
<td>Frequently demonstrates abilities within critical elements of the job.</td>
<td>Does not demonstrate abilities within critical elements of job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Quality of Work:</strong> Completion of all work related to this position in a thorough and accurate manner.</td>
<td>Work performance exceeds expectations for this position in quality, timeliness and accuracy.</td>
<td>Work performed is consistently accurate, thorough and completed within project deadlines.</td>
<td>Work consistently requires checking for accuracy and thoroughness after completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Timeliness of Work:</strong> Completion of all work related to this position in a timely manner within guidelines.</td>
<td>Assigned and routine job tasks are completed without prompting in timely manner.</td>
<td>Work performed is consistently completed within project deadlines.</td>
<td>Work is frequently completed after defined timelines requiring prompts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Interpersonal Skills:</strong> Demonstrated respect, courtesy and compassion in the school community.</td>
<td>Always demonstrates a genuine concern for all without complaint.</td>
<td>Courteous to others, complaints rarely received, excellent self-control demonstrated.</td>
<td>Often disrespectful to others, exhibits little self-control with excessive complaints received.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Acceptance of Supervision:</strong> Ability to follow instructions and accept suggestions from supervisory personnel.</td>
<td>Always sets high personal performance goals that improve the school.</td>
<td>Accepts supervision and direction well, questions supervision in a constructive manner.</td>
<td>Requires constant supervision, disregards supervision and directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Collaboration:</strong> Demonstrated collaborative, positive attitude when working with staff.</td>
<td>Initiates collaborative activities that improve the school's performance and image.</td>
<td>Consistently demonstrates a collaborative, positive attitude in the workplace.</td>
<td>Personal behaviors disrupt the workplace and completion of job tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication Skills: Demonstrated quality and frequency of confidential communications within the school community.</td>
<td>Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>Meets Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Models professionalism in all written and verbal communications without exception</td>
<td>Completes correspondence and employee matters in a confidential and timely manner</td>
<td>Does not maintain confidentiality when required and is frequently “off task” in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Adaptability: Ability to adjust and redirect behavior and performance within the school.</td>
<td>Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>Meets Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job experience, knowledge makes this employee the “go to” person on unique job situations</td>
<td>Usually exercises good judgment in dealing with varied job situations</td>
<td>Regularly relies on others for direction, expects frequent consideration of personal needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Commitment: Ability to demonstrate commitment to the job and acceptance of responsibility.</td>
<td>Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>Meets Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrates commitment, responsibility and ownership in all job tasks</td>
<td>Completes job tasks as assigned while accepting responsibility for personal actions</td>
<td>Fails to complete duties of the job and does not demonstrate responsibility for personal actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Attendance: Documented employee attendance at work.</td>
<td>Exceeds Standard</td>
<td>Meets Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employee is rarely absent or late to work</td>
<td>Occasionally absent or late to work providing supervisor with advance notice as required</td>
<td>Excessive absenteeism or tardiness to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follows work practices and procedures and improves safety practices</td>
<td>Routinely adheres to safety practices and workplace compliance matters</td>
<td>Frequently neglects common safety practices without regard for the safety of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluatee's signature: 
Evaluator's signature: 

Evaluated comments: 
Evaluator's summary comments:
APPENDIX E

SUPERINTENDENT LETTER
Dear Superintendent,

I am writing to gain your permission to conduct research in your school district. The purpose of this study is to investigate paraeducator evaluation through the perceptions of paraeducators and principals. Very little study exists regarding appraisal of paraeducators, and I am eager to help build a base of research around this topic through a case study.

This study will investigate the connection between the concepts and recommendations identified in the literature surrounding performance appraisal in general, and paraeducators’ and their evaluators’ experiences in participating in paraeducator evaluation. The following research question will guide the study: What is the process of paraeducator evaluation? The following subquestions will be investigated:

1) How do paraeducators and principals perceive their experiences with evaluations in their schools?

2) How do paraeducators and principals perceive evaluations in relation to paraeducator employment?

3) How do principals perceive their preparation for participating in paraeducator evaluation?

With your permission, and with the help of the Associate Superintendent, I will arrange voluntary interviews with paraeducators, assistant principals, and principals. At least 6 paraeducators will be selected for interviewing, and I will seek a range of participants so that many different experiences are reflected within the research: high performers vs. low performers; experiences working in only one school vs. experiences working in more than one school; paraeducators who have worked as paraeducators for three years or fewer vs. paraeducators who have worked for more than three years; various types of paraeducators (for example, special education, reading, ELL). At least 6 principals or assistant principals will be selected for interviewing, and I will seek a range of participants so that different experiences are reflected within the research: experience working as a principal/assistant principal only in your school district vs. principal/assistant principal experience in other districts as well; principals/assistant principals who have served in their positions for 3 years or fewer vs. principals/assistant principals who have served for more than 3 years. Paraeducators will not be selected from a particular school if the principal or assistant principal from that school is a participant in the study.

A consent document will be given to participants at the beginning of each interview. Each participant will have the chance to ask questions before signing the document. Data will be collected through approximately 45 minute interviews, which will be recorded using an audio recording device and then transcribed. I have attached Interview Guides for your review.

The following documents will also be collected:

- A copy of the paraeducator evaluation tool
The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. Participation is voluntary and requires no legal, financial, physical, social, psychological obligation, or any greater involvement than what one might experience in normal daily activities. I commit to protecting the confidentiality of the information provided during the interview process.

Potential benefits from participation in this research study may include participants' increased reflection around their experiences regarding paraeducator evaluation, and increased interest in gaining more information about paraeducator evaluation.

I am eager to discuss my study further with you, and am very hopeful that you will allow me to conduct my case study in your school district. I will be calling you within the next few days so that I can answer any questions that you may have and we can discuss how I might move forward with my research.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynn Glickman  
Graduate Student at Northern Illinois University

Dissertation Advisor:  
Dr. Teresa Wasonga
APPENDIX F

EXPERIENCE SPREADSHEET
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years at school</th>
<th>Years in district</th>
<th>Years in education</th>
<th>Years as admin</th>
<th># of districts</th>
<th>Schools in district</th>
<th>Was a teacher?</th>
<th>Spec Ed Para</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>ESL/ Bilingual</th>
<th>ECC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michaela</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

JOB DESCRIPTIONS
**Job Description: ELL Tutor/Teacher Assistant**

**JOB TITLE:** ELL Tutor/Teacher Assistant  
**REPORTS TO:** Appropriate Administrator, Principal, Classroom Teacher

**LOCATION:** School Buildings  
**TERM:** 180 Days

**HOURS:** 6.5 Hours Per Day

**SUMMARY:**
Assist the classroom teachers and support instruction to meet program objectives.

**ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** *Other duties may be assigned.*
- Communicates, collaborates, and cooperates with colleagues, supervisors, and students.
- Interact as part of the instructional team.
- Assist in the assessment of students, i.e. translation of tests.
- Collaborate in parent involvement activities.
- Create a supportive, empathetic environment for students and parents.
- Communicate with parents but not initiating conferences/appointments.
- Translate appropriate academic materials from classroom teachers (written and/or oral), following order of priority: 1st-ELL issues, 2nd-Classroom issues.
- Participate in Staff Development opportunities.

**SUPERVISORY DUTIES:** Supervises students.

In order to perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, ability, physical demands and work environment required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

**QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:**
- Completion of requirements for a high school diploma.
- Must hold NCLB paraprofessional approval (TASN) from the Illinois State Board of Education.
- Must have completed a minimum of 60 semester hours of college coursework or an Associate’s degree, or passed ETS or WorkKeys tests.
- Experience in a school environment working with children is preferred.
- Knowledge and ability in the areas of public relations, writing, and communications.
- Experience with electronic office software; e.g., MS Word and MS Excel.
- Ability to speak, write and read in a language other than English is preferred.

**SKILLS REQUIRED:**
- Ability to read, interpret and write written and verbal information. Ability to write routine reports. Ability to speak effectively with students and staff.
- Ability to calculate figures and amounts using basic mathematics concepts related to school district information.
- Ability to apply common sense understanding to carry out instructions furnished in written, oral, or diagram form. Ability to deal with problems involving several concrete variables in non-standardized situation.
• Ability to operate a computer and related software in an Apple computer environment.
• Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with students, staff and the school community.
• Ability to speak clearly and concisely both in oral and written communication.
• Ability to perform duties with awareness of all district requirements and Board of Education policies.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:
• While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to talk or hear.
• The employee frequently is required to stand, walk, operate office equipment, sit, and occasionally to reach with hands and arms.
• The employee may occasionally lift and/or move up to 30 pounds.

WORK ENVIRONMENT:
• The noise level in the work environment is usually quiet. On occasion the noise level will be moderate to high.
• Work is usually conducted indoors. This work is normally conducted at a single school site.

EVALUATION: Job performance is evaluated in accordance to district guidelines by the administrator with input from the classroom teacher.

The information contained in this job description is for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is not an exhaustive listing of the duties performed in this position. The individuals currently holding this position perform additional duties and additional duties may be assigned.

Community Consolidated School District 62 is an Equal Opportunity Employer. It is the policy and practice of District 62 to decide all matters relating to employment solely on the basis of the applicant’s ability to perform the essential functions of the position. District 62 ensures equal employment opportunities regardless of race, creed, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, or handicap. The District has a policy of active recruitment of qualified minority teachers and non-certificated employees. Any individual needing assistance in making application for this opening should contact Human Resources.

Revised 10/11
Job Description: Teacher Assistant, Pre-School

JOB TITLE: Teacher Assistant, Pre-School  REPORTS TO: Appropriate Administrator, Principal, Classroom Teacher

LOCATION: School Buildings  TERM: 180 Days

HOURS: 6.5 Hours Per Day

SUMMARY:
Assists the teacher in general daily classroom activities, with the primary focus being working with students.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES. Other duties may be assigned.
- Communicates, collaborates, and cooperates with colleagues, supervisors, and students.
- Assists in small group pupil instruction; tutors pupils at teacher’s request;
- Assists teacher in maintaining discipline and other (non) instructional functions.
- Assists with set up of classroom and prepares materials for specialized instructional units.
- Handles attendance reports and related clerical functions with the teacher.
- Assists in assembling/hanging materials on bulletin boards and keeping displays current.
- Operates standard school equipment such as laminator, copier, A.V. equipment, etc.
- May escort and assist children in various settings.
- Some positions may require assisting students with personal hygiene and feeding.
- Participate in Staff Development opportunities.

SUPERVISORY DUTIES: Supervises students.

In order to perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, ability, physical demands and work environment required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:
- Completion of requirements for a high school diploma.
- Must hold NCLB paraprofessional approval (TASN) from the Illinois State Board of Education.
- Must have completed a minimum of 60 semester hours of college coursework or an Associate’s degree, or passed ETS or WorkKeys tests.
- Experience in a school environment working with children is preferred.
- Knowledge and ability in the areas of public relations, writing, and communications.
- Experience with electronic office software; e.g., MS Word and MS Excel.
- Ability to speak, write and read in a language other than English is preferred.

SKILLS REQUIRED:
- Ability to read, interpret and write written and verbal information. Ability to write routine reports. Ability to speak effectively with students and staff.
- Ability to calculate figures and amounts using basic mathematics concepts related to school district information.
- Ability to apply common sense understanding to carry out instructions furnished in written, oral, or
diagram form. Ability to deal with problems involving several concrete variables in non-standardized situation.
- Ability to operate a computer and related software in an Apple computer environment.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with students, staff and the school community. Ability to speak clearly and concisely both in oral and written communication.
- Ability to perform duties with awareness of all district requirements and Board of Education policies.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:
- While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to talk or hear.
- The employee frequently is required to stand, walk, operate office equipment, sit, and occasionally to reach with hands and arms.
- The employee may occasionally lift and/or move up to 30 pounds.

WORK ENVIRONMENT:
- The noise level in the work environment is usually quiet. On occasion the noise level will be moderate to high.
- Work is usually conducted indoors. This work is normally conducted at a single school site.

EVALUATION: Job performance is evaluated in accordance to district guidelines by the administrator with input from the classroom teacher.

The information contained in this job description is for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is not an exhaustive listing of the duties performed in this position. The individuals currently holding this position perform additional duties and additional duties may be assigned.

Community Consolidated School District 62 is an Equal Opportunity Employer. It is the policy and practice of District 62 to decide all matters relating to employment solely on the basis of the applicant’s ability to perform the essential functions of the position. District 62 ensures equal employment opportunities regardless of race, creed, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, or handicap. The District has a policy of active recruitment of qualified minority teachers and non-certificated employees. Any individual needing assistance in making application for this opening should contact Human Resources.

Revised 10/11
Job Description: Teacher Asst., Elementary Classroom

JOB TITLE: Teacher Asst., Elementary Classroom
REPORTS TO: Appropriate Administrator, Principal, Classroom Teacher

LOCATION: School Buildings
TERM: 180 Days

HOURS: 6.5 Hours Per Day

SUMMARY:
Assists the teacher in general daily classroom activities.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES. Other duties may be assigned.
- Communicates, collaborates, and cooperates with colleagues, supervisors, and students.
- Assists teacher with student behavior management.
- Assists with set up of classroom and prepares materials for specialized instructional units.
- Handles attendance reports and related clerical functions with the teacher.
- Assists in assembling/hanging materials on bulletin boards and keeping displays current.
- May escort children to and from various rooms.
- Assists instructional personnel with the presentation of learning materials and instructional exercises.
- Tutor students individually or in small groups to reinforce and follow up learning activity.
- Operates standard school equipment; such as laminator, copier, and A.V. equipment, etc.
- Assists in monitoring student progress.
- Participate in Staff Development opportunities.

SUPERVISORY DUTIES: Supervises students.

In order to perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, ability, physical demands and work environment required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:
- Completion of requirements for a high school diploma.
- Must hold NCLB paraprofessional approval (TASN) from the Illinois State Board of Education.
- Must have completed a minimum of 60 semester hours of college coursework or an Associate’s degree, or passed ETS or WorkKeys tests.
- Experience in a school environment working with children is preferred.
- Knowledge and ability in the areas of public relations, writing, and communications.
- Experience with electronic office software; e.g., MS Word and MS Excel.
- Ability to speak, write and read in a language other than English is preferred.
SKILLS REQUIRED:
- Ability to read, interpret and write written and verbal information. Ability to write routine reports. Ability to speak effectively with students and staff.
- Ability to calculate figures and amounts using basic mathematics concepts related to school district information.
- Ability to apply common sense understanding to carry out instructions furnished in written, oral, or diagram form. Ability to deal with problems involving several concrete variables in non-standardized situation.
- Ability to operate a computer and related software in an Apple computer environment.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with students, staff and the school community. Ability to speak clearly and concisely both in oral and written communication.
- Ability to perform duties with awareness of all district requirements and Board of Education policies.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:
- While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to talk or hear.
- The employee frequently is required to stand, walk, operate office equipment, sit, and occasionally to reach with hands and arms.
- The employee must occasionally lift and/or move up to 30 pounds; such as files and paper supplies.

WORK ENVIRONMENT:
- The noise level in the work environment is usually quiet. On occasion the noise level will be moderate to high.
- Work is usually conducted inside the school. This work is normally conducted at a single school site.

EVALUATION: Job performance is evaluated in accordance to district guidelines by the administrator with input from the classroom teacher.

The information contained in this job description is for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is not an exhaustive listing of the duties performed in this position. The individuals currently holding this position perform additional duties and additional duties may be assigned.

Community Consolidated School District 62 is an Equal Opportunity Employer. It is the policy and practice of District 62 to decide all matters relating to employment solely on the basis of the applicant’s ability to perform the essential functions of the position. District 62 ensures equal employment opportunities regardless of race, creed, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, or handicap. The District has a policy of active recruitment of qualified minority teachers and non-certificated employees. Any individual needing assistance in making application for this opening should contact Human Resources.

Revised 10/11
Job Description: Teacher Asst., Special Education

JOB TITLE: Teacher Asst., Special Education  REPORTS TO: Appropriate Administrator, Principal, Classroom Teacher

LOCATION: School Buildings  TERM: 180 days

HOURS: 6.5 Hours Per Day

SUMMARY:
Assists the teacher in general daily classroom activities, with the primary focus being working with students.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: Other duties may be assigned.
- Communicates, collaborates, and cooperates with colleagues, supervisors, and students.
- Assists in small group student instruction; tutors pupils at teacher’s request.
- Assists teacher with student behavior management.
- Assists with set up of classroom and prepares materials for specialized instructional units.
- Handles attendance reports and related clerical functions with the teacher.
- Assists in assembling/hanging materials on bulletin boards and keeping displays current.
- Operates standard school equipment such as laminator, copier, A.V. equipment, assistive technology devices etc.
- May escort and assist children in various settings
- Some positions may require assisting students with personal hygiene and feeding.
- Assists in monitoring student progress.
- Assists in administrating state and local testing.
- Participate in Staff Development opportunities.

SUPERVISORY DUTIES: Supervises students.

In order to perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, ability, physical demands and work environment required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:
- Completion of requirements for a high school diploma.
- Must hold NCLB paraprofessional approval (TASN) from the Illinois State Board of Education.
- Must have completed a minimum of 60 semester hours of college coursework or an Associates degree, or passed ETS or WorkKeys tests.
- Experience in a school environment working with children is preferred.
- Knowledge and ability in the areas of public relations, writing, and communications.
- Experience with electronic office software; e.g., MS Word and MS Excel.
- Ability to speak, write and read in a language other than English is preferred.

SKILLS REQUIRED:
- Ability to read, interpret and write written and verbal information. Ability to write routine reports.
  Ability to speak effectively with students and staff.
● Ability to calculate figures and amounts using basic mathematics concepts related to school district information.
● Ability to apply common sense understanding to carry out instructions furnished in written, oral, or diagram form. Ability to deal with problems involving several concrete variables in non-standardized situation.
● Ability to operate a computer and related software in an Apple computer environment.
● Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with students, staff and the school community. Ability to speak clearly and concisely both in oral and written communication.
● Ability to perform duties with awareness of all district requirements and Board of Education policies.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:
● While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to talk or hear.
● The employee frequently is required to stand, walk, operate office equipment, sit, and occasionally to reach with hands and arms.
● The employee may occasionally lift and/or move up to 30 pounds.

WORK ENVIRONMENT:
● The noise level in the work environment is usually quiet. On occasion the noise level will be moderate to high.
● Work is usually conducted indoors. This work is normally conducted at a single school site.

EVALUATION: Job performance is evaluated in accordance to district guidelines by the administrator with input from the classroom teacher.

The information contained in this job description is for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is not an exhaustive listing of the duties performed in this position. The individuals currently holding this position perform additional duties and additional duties may be assigned.

Community Consolidated School District 62 is an Equal Opportunity Employer. It is the policy and practice of District 62 to decide all matters relating to employment solely on the basis of the applicant’s ability to perform the essential functions of the position. District 62 ensures equal employment opportunities regardless of race, creed, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, or handicap. The District has a policy of active recruitment of qualified minority teachers and non-certificated employees. Any individual needing assistance in making application for this opening should contact the office Human Resources.

Revised 10/11